

A Brief History of the High Street Church Building

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In 1894 the First Christian Church held a revival meeting in a 1500 seat tent at the corner of High St. and Orange in what was then called Tower Park, after a large water tower that dominated the landscape. The revival lasted for 11 weeks and resulted in so many new members for the church that its leaders decided to erect a church building on the opposite corner of High Street. Alexander Blair was hired as the architect, and the construction was completed in 1898. The building was dedicated on November 5, 1899.

Alexander Blair's original design of the church building included a steeple, and probably a bell, on the corner tower and high Victorian-style conical roofs on the other towers, but these features were never built due to budget cuts. St. Joseph's Cathedral, First Baptist Church and Newton Chapel on the Mercer Campus were all built about the same time as the High Street Church building.

Renovations to the building were done several times. An upstairs room was added in 1910 for Sunday school classes. In 1913 the interior of the church was remodeled and a hand-pumped pipe organ installed. In January 1914 a fire spread to the church from another house on High Street and water damaged the piano and pipe organ. The basement was hand dug in 1914-1915 by fifty men who agreed to dig two nights a week if the women provided good hot food.

The church was redecorated in 1933. During World War II there was a monthly party for the soldiers, a club was organized for the wives of soldiers, and soldiers coming to Sunday service were taken home for a good meal. In 1944 First Christian Church moved to a suburban location on Vineville Avenue and the High Street building was sold to the Georgia Christian Missionary Society for its state headquarters. The Missionary Society later sold the building to Central Church of Christ. Central Church removed the organ, since musical instruments are not used in their churches. Central Church also moved to the suburbs in 1988 and sold the building to the Unitarian Universalist Society of Middle Georgia, as our congregation was called then.

The water tower in Tower Park was disassembled during the early 1900s and the bricks were probably used in paving Orange and High Streets. Change has been a constant feature of life in this historic neighborhood, and each congregation that has occupied 1085 High Street has adapted the original building to suit its

evolving needs. Unlike our predecessors, the High Street Unitarian Universalist congregation decided in 2000 that its future does not lie in the suburbs, but in downtown Macon on High Street.

In 2001 the 100-member Unitarian Universalist Congregation undertook a campaign to raise \$550,000 for a thorough structural reconstruction of the building. Azar & Walsh architects prepared a plan to enlarge the interior space, particularly classrooms in the downstairs and upper floor and to restore the beauty of the main floor sanctuary, while adding modern infrastructure to the century old building. Chris R. Sheridan Company began renovation work on November 4, 2003 and the High Street Congregation moved to temporary quarters on the Mercer campus and at Temple Beth Israel. With substantial completion of the renovation on January 4, 2004, the congregation returned to its new building. The capital campaign was closed on May 24, 2004, having raised a total of \$560,640 in cash from the generous members and friends of High Street Unitarian Universalist Church. The combined gifts of many people have enabled the High Street Church building to continue as an historic home for a vibrant downtown ministry.