

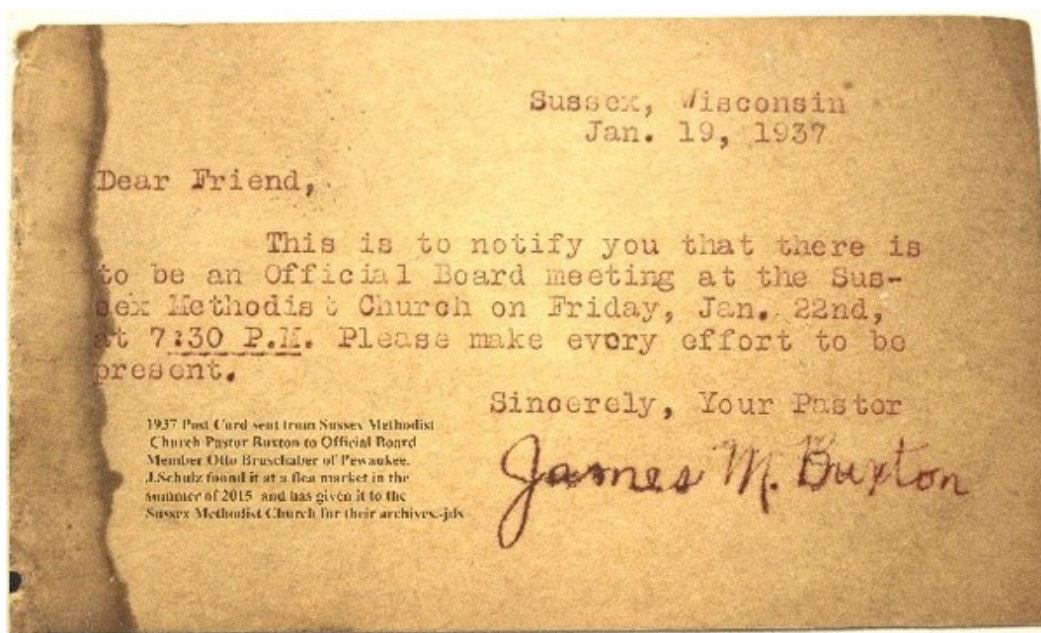
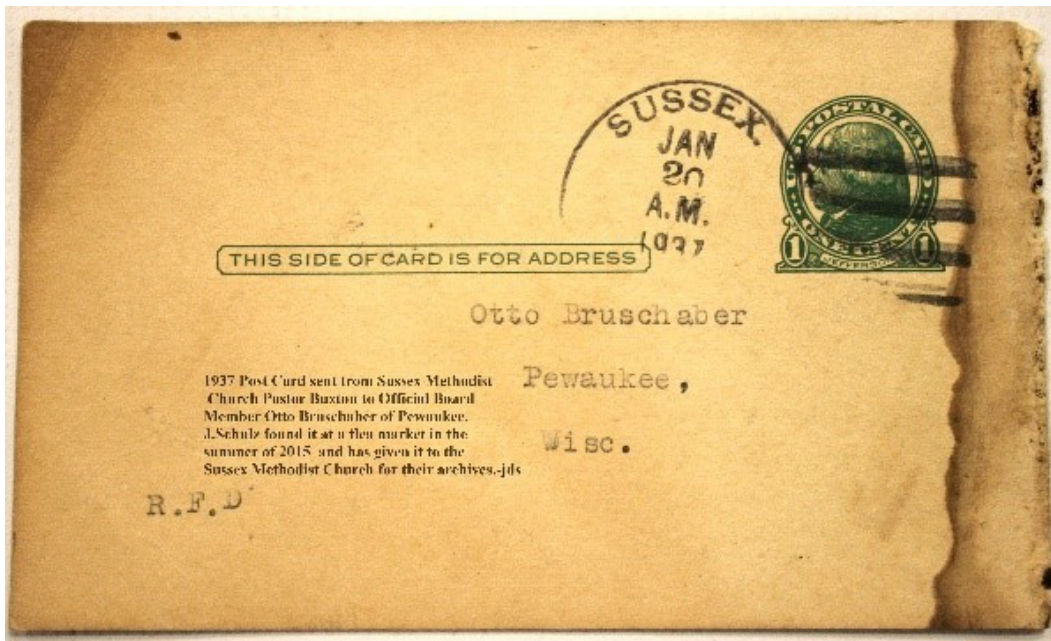
# History

First United Methodist Church, Racine, WI, September 2015 Newsletter:

First United Methodist CHURCH HISTORY ~THEN & NOW~

Racine, Wisconsin Judith D. Schulz, Church Historian

Editing assistance from Carol Michael Feest & Judy Johnson Madsen



## **Flea Market find leads to More of Our Church History?**

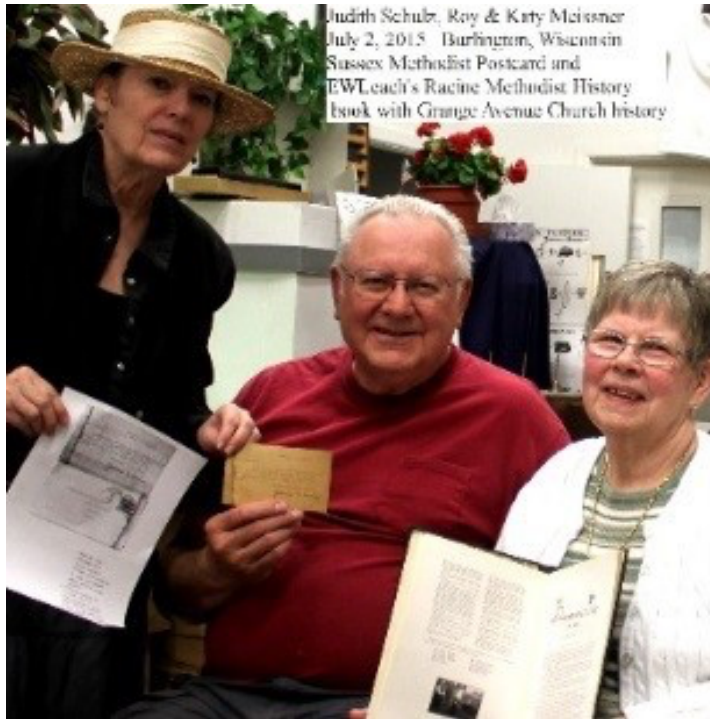
### **Why would this old, stained 1937 Penny Postcard be of interest to us?**

I came across this postcard at the Elkhorn Flea Market this summer. The **words “Sussex Methodist Church” caught my eye** while thumbing through thousands of postcards for hours. I saw that it was from their Pastor James Buxton to a board member, **in 1937!** I quickly bought the card for \$1.

First thing Monday morning I googled Sussex Methodist Church... hoping it was still in existence. **It WAS!** There was the phone number, and they even had office hours that very day until noon! When I called, the person who answered listened to my story and then said “Wow! That is *very* interesting!” She had an interest in the church’s history. (I knew I had reached the right person!)

She said she would forward the info to their church historian. I immediately emailed the story with images of the postcards to her. **Just two hours later** I already had an email response from Roy Meissner, their church historian. He was quite interested, and I was *very pleased* with the idea of adding something to another Methodist Church’s history in our state.

**That would have been enough fun, but then it turns out...** that his wife, Katy, used to go to Racine’s Grange Ave Methodist Church growing up and he would drive to Racine to go with her to church at Grange when they were dating. (She was living in Racine then with an aunt & working at Osters.)



I wondered if we might know some of the same people? Roy & Katy make annual visits to Mound Cemetery to visit family buried there, and it turns out they were going to Racine this same week, so they asked if they could stop by to pick up the post card. As I was in Burlington, not Racine, they quickly agreed to make Burlington a part of their return trip to the Sussex area.

During their visit, I shared a few of the connections of our church to Grange, and shared E.W. Leach's 1912 book *History of Racine and the Methodist Episcopal Church*.

There is a chapter on **Grange Avenue Methodist Church** and the member's names that transferred from our church membership to start Grange on February 4, 1912. **GUESS what!.....** Her grandfather and grandmother's names were on that transfer list, meaning that they were members of our First M.E. Church in the early 1900's!

On page 134: Edward Samuel Langdon, Jr. and his wife, Mrs. Amelia Langdon, of 1637 Packard Avenue. Her father was just 15 so wouldn't have been listed, just adults were listed.

***I was sitting and talking with a descendant of three of our church members from the early 1900's!!!*** Her grandparents & father would have known people we have in church photographs and in church records of that era! Roy & Katy had come to pick up the post card, but we ended up visiting for 3 hours!



Many other Methodist connections: Katy's father was the pastor at Sussex and had served in Franksville & Yorkville. Roy's brother is a retired Methodist pastor in Wisconsin. They have an old church cornerstone stored in their basement! Their daughter lives in a house that used old windows and doors from a Methodist church that was torn down. Many interesting Methodist stories~ plus the direct connection to our church!

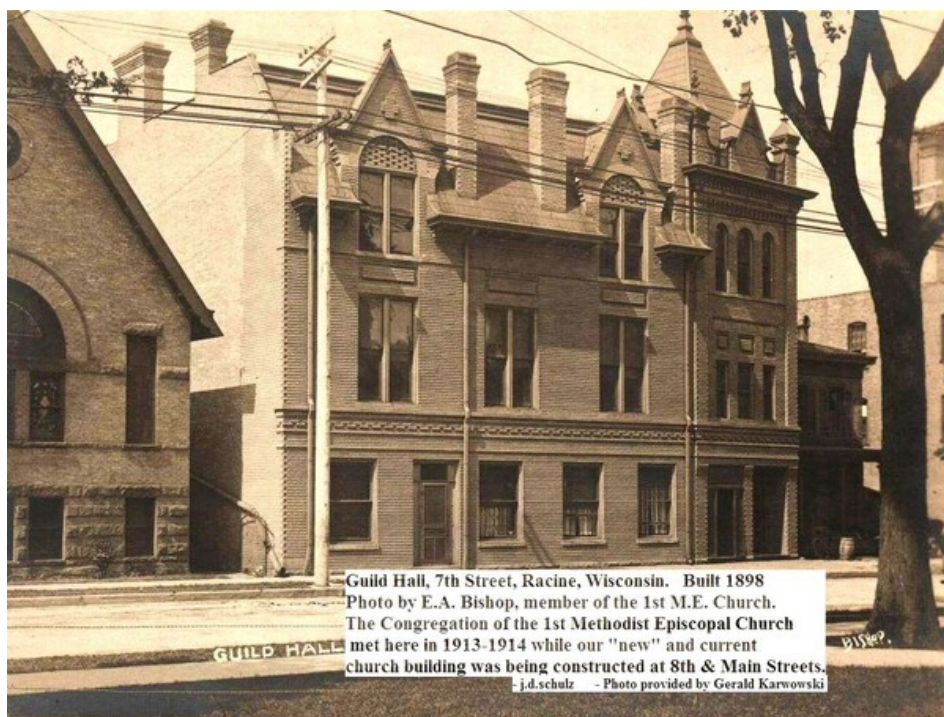
**Finding that old postcard at a flea market connected us** to a living descendant of two of our members from the early 1900's, and to the Methodist history that we have in common. They plan to visit our church soon!

## **NEW DISPLAY OF OLD!**

Judy & Andy Madsen and I have started researching and preparing a display of copies of the 12 items that came out of the 1870 cornerstone box that was in the inside wall.

**September 2015** History pages by Judith D. Schulz

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Guild Hall, 7th Street, Racine, Wisconsin. Built 1898  
Photo by E.A. Bishop, member of the 1st M.E. Church.  
The Congregation of the 1st Methodist Episcopal Church  
met here in 1913-1914 while our "new" and current  
church building was being constructed at 8th & Main Streets.  
- j.d.schulz - Photo provided by Gerald Karowski

## **Guild Hall in Racine News!**

Guild Hall, 312 7th Street, Racine, Wisconsin, was built in 1898. The building was covered with a metal façade for many recent decades and used as a building for professional services, including dental offices.

This summer a wooden time capsule box was found in the Cornerstone of the building, when it was being torn down as part of the Porter's Furniture Store property. The box contained coins and 3 newspapers of the era. **Our**

**Congregation, First Methodist Episcopal Church, met**

**in Guild Hall from 1913 to 1914** while our "new" and current church building was being constructed at 8th & Main Streets. What do you think the rent was?

The above photograph was taken by E.A. Bishop, *a Member of our congregation* and a well-known Racine photographer, who was called "The Post Card Man."

**From the Oct. 5, 1913; Sunday Church bulletin** found inside the cornerstone's box which we opened Sept 11, 2011.

**It reads: "Place of Meeting while Building New Church**

**GUILD HALL, 312 7<sup>th</sup> ST. (Opposite High School.)**

SUNDAY, OCT. 5TH, 1913.

**First  
Methodist Episcopal  
Church.**

**Place of Meeting while Building New Church  
GUILD HALL, 312 7TH, ST.**

Sunday Church Bulletin (Opposite High School.)

found in the 1913 Cornerstone

box opened Sept 11, 2011

8th & Main St.

Racine, Wisconsin

**Morning Worship and Bible School,**

**From 10:30 to 12:15.**

**Junior League 3:15 P.M.**

**Epworth League, 6:30 P.M.**

**Evening Service, 7:30 P.M.**

**Thos. G. Cocks, D. D., Pastor,**

932 Lake Ave. Telephone 3693.

Miss Edith Wilsey, Deaconess,

732 Wisconsin St., Tel 112.

## **From the July 6, 1913, Sunday Church Bulletin**

### **Announcements**

Wednesday 7:30 p.m. Mid-week Prayer Meeting. This is our first service to be held in Guild Hall. COME. Our Pastor will lead.

July 6, 1913 Church Bulletin Con't

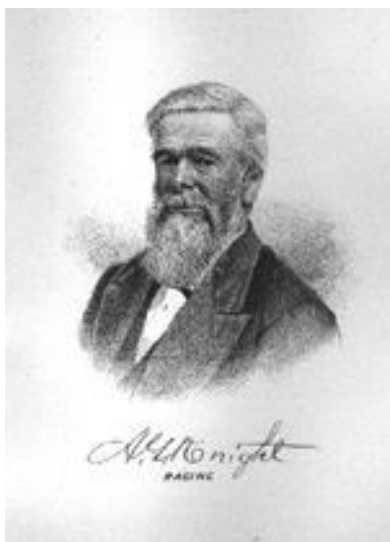
Commencing with Wednesday, all the regular services of the church will be held in Guild Hall,

312 7th St. This will continue during the entire time of removing the old, and building the new church home. All services as usual.

~ Even though Guild Hall is gone, one can picture and imagine our members in 1913-1914 heading into this building for their services with the excitement of the new construction just a few blocks away.

## **More Descendants of Albert G. Knight Visit Our Church!**

*AGK is one of our church founders and is named on the stained-glass window in the sanctuary next to the elevator.*



Recently, Yorkville residents Michael Knight (great, great grandson of AGK) & his wife Carol brought Michael's brother Jim (of Waco, Texas) and Jim's grandchildren to see the window and learn more about this well-known Knight ancestor. This was a second visit from 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> generation descendants of AGK. In fact, Michael & Carol brought many other family members and AGK descendants: siblings and their children and their grandchildren to our first cornerstone opening event, too, on Sun. Sept. 11,

2011. ~~These are heartfelt connections of the past to our present. We are so pleased that AGK's family comes to visit.

**ALBERT GALLATIN KNIGHT** was a pioneer of Racine and a founder of our church. From the book of 1892 Portrait and Biographical Album, Racine and Kenosha Counties: *“The Methodist Episcopal Church of Racine had no more zealous supporter than A.G. Knight. He helped to organize the society and to build the first church, also aided in building the present commodious and elegant edifice of that denomination while his home, which was noted for a large hearted hospitality, was ever open to ministers and presiding elders of his church.”* In the 1800s he served as Register of Deeds, County Clerk, Treasurer, Alderman and Assessor. In 1854 he formed a Title Company, today called the Knight-Barry Title Group in Racine.

### **From a document in the 1870 cornerstone box**

a list names the Trustees of our church of 1870: Stephen Campbell, George W. Slauson, Albert G. Knight, John. F. Goold, Wm. Bull, Elias Jones, Wm. P. Lyon, Wm. G. Roberts, Simon C. Yout.

**September 2015:** History pages by Judith D. Schulz Copyright September 2015 **First United Methodist Church Racine WI**



First United Methodist Church, the city's first organized congregation (then called First Methodist Episcopal Church), first built this wooden church on Barnstable Street. Later the street was called Pearl Street and citizens and the newspaper referred to it as the "Pearl Street Church." Pearl Street was then renamed College Ave. This building was sold in 1870 and the congregation built a new church on the corner of 8th and Main, Racine, Wisconsin.



By Marci Laehr Tenuta

Sunday, November 20, 2005, 2:04 AM CST

The roots of Racine as an industrial town, a port of trade, and an invention capital, may run deep, but historically this city was also known for its Methodist church. First United Methodist Church was the very first organized congregation in the Belle City and once was responsible for Racine becoming known as a religious destination.

In pioneer days, according to a historical booklet written for First United Methodist's sesquicentennial celebration, it was commonly said, "Go where you will in Wisconsin, you will find someone who was converted in the Methodist Church of Racine."

The Rev. Brad Van Fossen, the church's current pastor, said that came from popular and enthusiastic revivals the Methodist Society - as it was known then - held here. The very first revival, a four-day event, was held in August 1838, Van Fossen said. The book "The Methodist Church and Early Racine," written by historian E.W. Leach in 1912, says that first camp meeting was held on the property of William See, who owned a sawmill.

See provided the lumber for platforms to be built for the revival. People camped in tents on his meadow. People came from 100 miles away, Van Fossen said. The attendance was recorded at around 1,000 people, which was about 10 times Racine's population then. That first camp meeting was so well received, the Methodist Society started holding them regularly.

"They often had revivals," Van Fossen said.

The pioneers According to historical texts, See was a devout Methodist and lay minister, who came from Chicago to Racine somewhere between November 1834 and January 1835. He arrived here with three other men, Stephen Campbell, Paul Kingston and Edmond Weed, shortly after Gilbert Knapp laid claim to the territory.

The other men were also Methodists, and together they founded the Methodist Society in the area.

The actual organization of the first church is recorded as happening in the fall of 1836 by Samuel Pillsbury, who was sent by the Illinois Annual Conference to the Root River Mission, which was Racine. He was the first preacher regularly stationed here and lived on the east side of Main Street, near Seventh Street. Van Fossen pointed out that this bit of history is interesting considering that the church is now located at 745 Main St.

The church buildings in addition to the revivals, the early regular gatherings of the Methodist Society in Racine were held in private homes and tent camps. There is probability that they built a small log cabin for religious meetings but, as the congregation grew, services were held in rented buildings. In 1845, the Methodist Episcopal Church congregation built its first permanent church building on Barnstable Street, which is now College Avenue. The land had been deeded to the church by Benjamin and Nancy Jones for \$75. The colonial-style church held 300 people and was heated by cast iron wood stoves. It cost \$5,000 to build.

After an addition to the building in 1857 still didn't provide the room needed for the growing congregation, the church board purchased property at Main and Eighth streets in 1870. The church built a gothic-style building for \$40,000, which was dedicated on July 16, 1871.

In 1882, eleven years after it was built a horrible fire burned the new church down. The building was engulfed in flames, and the towering spire at the top fell into the middle of the church.

Fortunately, the fire burned from the inside out and spared the walls of the church. This prompted the congregation to quickly decide to rebuild, without a new spire.

The reconstruction project cost just under \$20,000. The new church was dedicated on Feb. 4, 1883. The First United Methodist Church that stands at 745 Main St. today was built in the early 1900s after officials and other members decided, after much heated debate, to raze the existing church.

S.C. Johnson, one of the most liberal benefactors to the church, proposed that he and the pastor raise half of the money needed from outside sources for the new church building, which they were successful at accomplishing, and helped fund the building that was dedicated on Oct. 18, 1914. The church's historical booklet says Johnson also lived to see the last mortgage that contractors held against the church board burned.

Since 1914, the First United Methodist Church building has undergone several extensive remodeling and redecorating projects. The most recent was five years ago, when a new entrance to the church was built on the north side.

The people Members of First United Methodist have a lot of pride in their congregation and its roots in Racine. The church's current membership is about 280 people.

"Some of the senior folks remember being brought here as children, and are now in their 80s and 90s," Van Fossen said.

Carol Feest, church secretary for 24 years, said her family has four generations attending First United Methodist right now. Her grandparents were members there too.

"There're families who have been here many, many years," she said. "I'm very proud that this is the oldest church in Racine."

Van Fossen said the pride in their history in this community is something many of the congregation members have, as well as the pastors who have served there.

"They keep their pastors for a very long time," he said. Although Van Fossen himself has only been the pastor at First United Methodist for five months, he said many of his predecessors had lengthy stays at the historical church. The Rev. Clarence Seidenspinner served as minister there from 1940 until his death in 1967.

Commitment to change About five years ago, before they embarked on a large remodeling job, church members discussed whether to stay in their current Downtown location and remodel or move to another site. "There was some heated discussion about that," Feest said.

The outcome, obviously, was to stay. "We're committed to Downtown," she said.

With that commitment comes change: Change in the way the church serves the community and change in the way it serves the congregation. Although members hold their history close to their heart, it cannot be said that First United has remained stagnant.

Seven years ago, the church began hosting the Empty Bowls fundraiser, which benefits Homeward Bound, a local homeless shelter for women and children. The church also partners with area churches to provide a sandwich lunch program and is a member of the Downtown Cooperative Parish.

Less than a year ago the church also began offering services in Spanish, which are led by the Rev. Ana Luisa Chacon. "That's gone well," Van Fossen said.



"We want to serve this population," Van Fossen said, the businesses in the area, as well as the neighborhoods.

Feest said the church has often helped neighbors who need it, and members feel that's important. For example, Van Fossen said, not too long ago a woman who had just been released from the Racine County Jail needed help getting home to New Jersey. She had come to serve a few weeks in jail to clear an old sentence, she but didn't have a way to get home. The woman had an apartment and family waiting for her.

First United Methodist and First Presbyterian joined up to get her the money for a bus ticket. Van Fossen drove her to Milwaukee to catch the bus, and she was able to get home.

"Being right across the street from the jail, we get people who have nothing," Feest said.

Van Fossen said what the church would like to do is go from being a helping hand to the people in the neighborhood to having neighborhood folks be part of the congregation.

"How do we go the next step so that we're their church and not just a helping hand?" Van Fossen asked. "That's a challenge. It would be something new."

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Note: the italicized statements in the above article are factual corrections based on original document research of 2011.