



Grace United Methodist Church

325 South Street

On September 20, 1882, in the farmhouse of Darius and Jennie Hewitt, a meeting took place among a small group of people who wanted to build a Second Methodist Church. At the time, there were no churches on the west side of Elgin. West-siders who wanted to attend church had to cross the river by boat, and the burden of this trip kept many people from worshipping. The formulation of a second Methodist church was in part a mission to bring people into the church. And there was obviously a need, since by the time a second meeting was held, the crowd was so big that the windows had to be opened so that those who could not get inside could hear the message outside.

David C. Cook is considered the founder of this church, and was a generous contributor to the building fund. In addition, George P. Lord, a prominent citizen, for whom Lords Park is named, pledged \$1,000 towards the new church, provided the church was not to cost less than \$10,000 to build. At the first fund-raising meeting, \$3,185 was pledged by members of the audience.

Other groups were busy raising money for the new church as well. The First Methodist Church held an oyster dinner and raised \$35. (Perhaps if they had something other than oysters, they might have made more money!) Henry Sherman, a generous benefactor, and well known in Elgin, had secured the donation of materials from the Elgin Lumber Company, as well as the help of anyone who could drive nails or handle boards, to help erect a temporary church building for services, which would later serve as a home for the minister and his family when the real church was completed.

The first new minister of the church was W.B. Leach. He expressed his joy at having been sent to Elgin, and announced that his first service would be held on October 29. This seemed like a bit of a delay to the followers, but they understood when they read the October 16 announcement in the newspaper, "Rev. W.B. Leach, pastor of Elgin's soon to be Second Methodist Church, will be married tomorrow evening to Miss Emma Werthwein of Hampshire."

The temporary church hall was completed in time to hold a reception for the new minister and his bride. The walls were of matched fencing and were unpainted. Bible verses decorated them, and support posts were hung with evergreen boughs. Seven lamps, donated by Wilkin and McClure, provided the lighting. When Pastor Leach and his party arrived, everyone sang, "Hold The Fort."

Services were held in this building for two years, until 1884, when the church at 325 South Street was completed, which has been used now for 110 years. The final cost of the building was \$17,000, including memorial windows of cathedral glass. The church sits on one of the highest spots in Elgin, and the lighted cross at its peak can be seen from almost anywhere in the city, day or night.

The style of this church is Gothic Revival, patterned after Gothic architecture in central Europe of the 15th and 16th century. 16th century European Gothic marked the height of religious fervor, and therefore, is appropriate here, in trying to capture that enthusiasm.

The high-pointed arch of the entryway to the church is actually an addition, very sensitively done, which enclosed the front steps and doors. Before this change was made, the two first-story windows in the tower were stepped, obviously following the staircase up. They were made parallel when the front facade was altered. In this west tower is the David C. Cook room, dedicated to him for his generosity in helping found the church.

The building has a rusticated stone base, and a polygonal bay and roof on the chapel element. The rose window on the front facade, with the ribbon window below it, is an unusual combination. A decorative element above is the blind arched opening which sits under the peak. The steeple tower features large scale Romanesque detail, evident in the corbelled brick and wall buttresses.