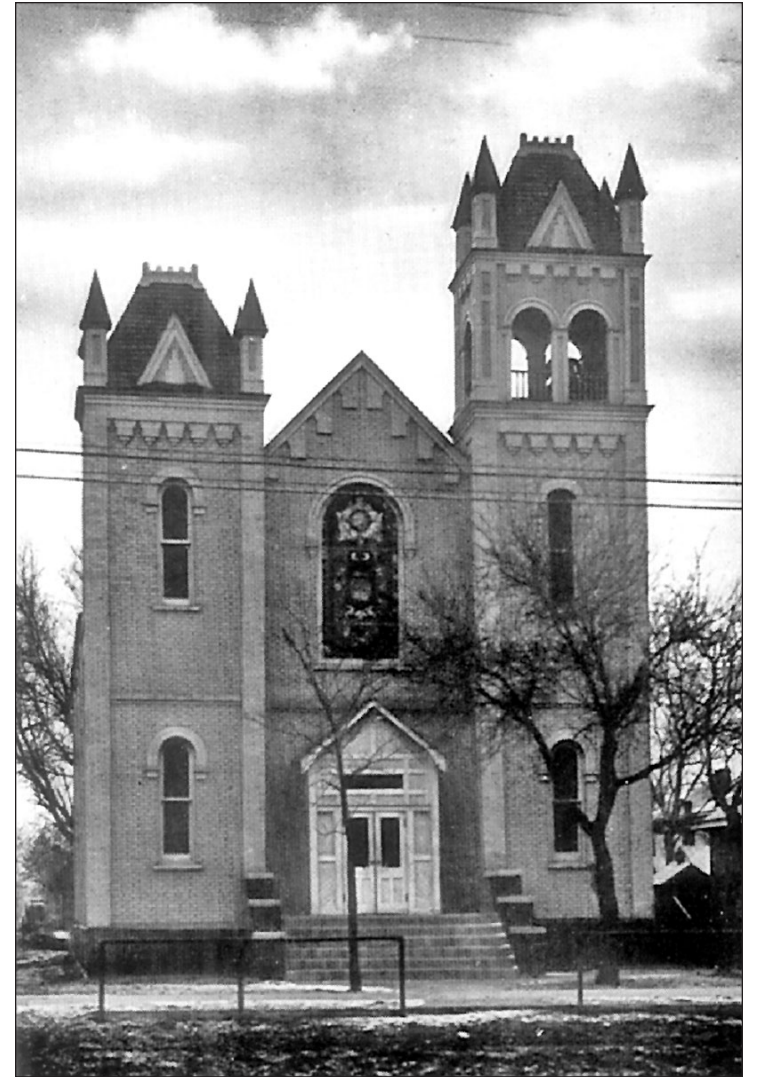




ABOVE: Members of the First United Methodist Church's History Committee met Tuesday to make final plans for this weekend's 150th anniversary celebration. They are (from left) Don Kudrna, Laurie Baily, David Holzwarth, Mary Alice Halverson, Bob Thue, Lee Skalberg, Associate Rev. Bob Cappel and Rev. Ron Johnson. **RIGHT:** The original First United Methodist Church building, which was erected in 1874, gave the congregation its first home to call its own. It was located near the corner of Fourth and Douglas. The current church, located at 11th and Cedar, was built in 1959, and the original structure was demolished in 1965.



P&D ARCHIVES

A 'Mother Church' Sees 150

First United Methodist Church Celebrates 150 Years Of Faith, Perseverance This Weekend

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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Yankton's First United Methodist Church has come a long way since holding services in the Dakota Territorial Capitol, and its members are ready to celebrate that fact.

This weekend, the congregation will mark its 150th anniversary with two days of events that will include food, music, hay rack rides and a worship service.

"We are the Mother Church of Methodism in South Dakota," the Rev. Ron Johnson said. "That is a big deal, so we want to give thanks to those who planted the seeds, had the faith and did the service to bring us to where we are at. Now they are handing it to us, and what do we do with it as we look to the future? What does that mean for us now?"

Looking at the church's early years, members of the History Committee that met Tuesday to make final preparations for the weekend's 150th celebration said it contained plenty of challenges.

The first Methodist pastor, Septimus Watson Ingham, arrived at Yankton in 1860 with a horse, saddlebags and an umbrella. He described the community as having two frame houses and three log cabins with dirt roofs.

Ingham would go on to preach the first Methodist sermon Oct. 21, 1860, in Yankton at the residence of Capt. John B. S. Todd, a cousin of President Abraham Lincoln's wife, Mary. Only a handful of people attended the morning ceremony due to the arrival of a steamboat. About 25 people came to that evening's sermon, but it was interrupted by a call for someone to help settle a quarrel between drunks.

In 1861, the congregation found a more permanent home in the Dakota Territorial Capitol, where it met until a church was built in 1874 at Fourth Street and Douglas Avenue.

When the bishop came to dedicate the new church in January 1874, he discovered it was \$2,000-\$3,000 in debt.

According to Bartlett Tripp, who eventually became chief justice of the South Dakota Supreme Court, the bishop told an usher "to lock the doors and let no man go from the room ... until the

debt is lifted."

The church was paid for and served as the congregation's home until the current place of worship was built in 1959 at 11th and Cedar streets on property purchased from Yankton College. The building at Fourth and Douglas was sold to members of the Assembly of God but was torn down in 1965 after being sold to the City of Yankton.

"(The 150th anniversary) challenges you to step back and

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REV. RON JOHNSON

think about, "What have we been given here? What is this all about and what does it mean?" Johnson said. "It was a struggle. We think we have all the problems today, but there were a lot of challenges back then. You reflect but also envision what is ahead."

Committee member Don Kudrna said the congregation wants to recognize the journey that has been made up to the present.

"There is a lot to look back on to take us into the future," he stated. "For some of the churches that came into Yankton, I think things fell into place a little more easily than other churches. It was a rough go at the start for our congregation, and it took a lot of hard work to get the first church built."

The weekend celebration will include a dedication of the parsonage and new church additions that have been built in recent years. Johnson said a symbolic burning of the mortgage will take place for those investments, which amounted to just more than \$1 million.

He said those accomplishments reflect the efforts of a thriving congregation of between 500-600 people.

"You think about an addition being paid for, you think about a parsonage, you think about all the mission work that has been done, and it all stems from our personal commitment and walking with Christ," he stated. "I

think that has to continue. But everyone has to have the vision of that. For younger families today, with all of our business and activity, church isn't necessarily a priority. It's one more thing that competes for their time, money and attention. It's trying to help them catch that vision of what we were and what we need to be in the future."

The Sunday morning worship service will feature Dr. Bruce Forbes, who is the religious studies department chair at Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa. He is also an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church and interned at the Yankton First United Methodist Church in 1972.

Forbes co-edited two books: "Religion and Popular Culture in America," as well as "Rapture, Revelation and the End Times: An Exploration of the Left Behind Series." He authored "Christmas: A Candid History" in 2007.

Johnson said Forbes has fond memories of his time with the Yankton congregation and looks forward to returning for the landmark celebration.

The public is welcome to join the First United Methodist Church in celebrating its heritage this weekend, Johnson added.

"We are part of the community, and we have a responsibility to them," he said. "Come celebrate with us and get to know us better."

This weekend's celebration will begin at 3 p.m. Saturday with an open house at the parsonage, located at 1203 West St. The open house will last until 5 p.m.

Following that:

- horse-drawn wagon rides will be available at the Riverside Ball Park beginning at 4:30 p.m.;
- a free picnic supper will be held at 5:30 p.m. in the ball park;
- a dedication of the parsonage and new church additions will take place in the ball park at 6:30 p.m., along with music and conversation with former pastors and 50-year church members.

- On Sunday:
 - church tours will be given from 9-10 a.m.;
 - a worship service featuring Dr. Bruce Forbes will be held at 10 a.m. at the church; and
 - a catered lunch will follow at 11:30 a.m. with a performance of a historical skit and an old-time hymn sing. Tickets are needed for the meal.

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