

First Presbyterian Church

Self-Guided Tour

On behalf of the pastors and members of First Presbyterian Church, welcome to this beautiful, historic building in downtown Salt Lake City.

The building sits on the corner lot of C Street and South Temple, once known as Brigham Street. When this structure was built, Salt Lake City was a bustling, growing city with streetcars running down the center of cobbled Brigham Street, and with the excitement of a booming economy.

This turn-of-the-century construction on Brigham Street was not the only magnificent structure being built; mansions of all sorts were under construction or already constructed along this prominent street. A few of those fine buildings remain.

Three prominent church buildings continue to line this street: the Mormon Temple, the Cathedral of the Madeleine (Roman Catholic), and First Presbyterian Church. Within a block or two is First United Methodist Church and Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral. All are within a short stroll from the downtown retail space. The origins of these churches cover the spectrum of Salt Lake City history and keep a vital religious community alive.

First Presbyterian Church was modeled after Carlisle Cathedral in Northern England near the Scottish border. The cornerstone was laid in 1902, and the building was constructed of sandstone quarried in Red Butte Canyon east of the University of Utah. Approximately, 36,000 stones were hauled to this site by horse-drawn wagons and set in place with a series of ropes, pulleys and

considerable human effort. During the construction there was only one serious accident when a worker fell approximately three stories from the vaulted ceiling in the sanctuary. His injuries, though considerable, were not fatal; quite a safety record for the day.

Stained Glass Windows

Most of the sanctuary is much as it was when the building was opened in the spring of 1905. The stained glass windows are a treasure in themselves. These works of art were produced by two brothers from Minneapolis, Robert and Thomas Giles. All the windows, with some repair, are the originals that were in place in 1905. The exception is the east Resurrection window; it was destroyed in a storm in October 1905. When the window was replaced the following year, a change was made to the artwork because in all of these “sermons in glass” one did not see a cross. The Session of the church at that time felt it was vitally important that this central symbol of the Christian faith be included in the stained glass and they asked the Giles brothers to find a way to include the cross.

The brothers cleverly changed the perspective of the window. The original window was from the perspective of looking into an empty tomb. A change was made to look out from the empty tomb towards Golgotha where you see the crosses on which our Savior and two thieves were crucified. Each of the windows has a particular time of day when it is most striking.

When the morning sun touches the Resurrection window, the angel seems to literally take flight and leap from the glass. From the front of the sanctuary you can see the reproduction in glass of the famous painting of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. This particular window at midday is most beautiful. However, on a gray day with minimal sunlight the mood of the window is almost mournful as you view Christ about to face his accusers and ultimately his

execution, again a very moving sermon in glass.

The west window is the Nativity, the birth of the baby Jesus. In 2003 when the windows were cleaned of years of grime and dirt, we found a real treasure. None of us in prior years had any idea that peeking over the manger was the delightful cherub you see today. Much of the fine detail of artifacts strewn about the manger floor was revealed in this cleaning.

The smaller windows along the west colonnade are equally precious and allow you a close-at-hand view of the quality of workmanship these windows represent. They combine both stained and art glass. In these lower windows the color is determined not only by the color of the glass used, but the relative thickness of the glass, as though the artisans somehow folded the nearly molten glass in upon itself. This creates glass of great beauty but presents a problem in preserving it. The thicker and thinner glass contracts and expands at different rates with a change in ambient temperature. The features of the figures in these windows are hand-painted and quite detailed. For example, you can imagine the temple priests and their amazement as they quizzed the young Jesus.

Architectural Features

When we undertook a major restoration project in 2002-03, one of our main goals was to preserve this historic sanctuary and its architectural features. As in all Gothic buildings, the high vaulted ceilings are a prominent feature. They were designed to draw the eye heavenward. Notice that the east-west vault and the north-south vault form a cross. The chandeliers hanging in the sanctuary were installed during Rev. Jesse Baird's pastorate (1928-31) and were his design. They replaced multiple electric lights that used to run along the beams that had proved inadequate to light the sanctuary.

The wood tracery and beams above you are beautiful examples of woodworking that is not often seen in modern building construction. The four conjoined circles – the quatrefoil or four leaves – have been interpreted as having at least two meanings. If you ask a theologian about the significance of the circles, the reply would most likely be that they represent the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. If you were to ask an anthropologist, the response might be that in medieval times the Christian church incorporated pagan symbols into their architecture to communicate with illiterate worshippers and that the quatrefoils represent the four elements: earth, air, fire and water.

Organ & Pipes

This building is on the register of historic sites and we want to preserve wherever practical the elements of this historic architecture. A pipe organ was installed in 1911 with much fanfare and publicity. At the time, the organ console was elevated above its current level so that when the organist played in a concert the audience could observe the footwork as well as the hands of the organist. Imagine a well-dressed audience of the 1920's watching as the feet of the organist flew about during a complex piece.

Many of the leather fittings and wooden stops of this old organ needed attention and repair if we were to restore the organ to the full range of its capabilities. Instead, in 1999 an electronic Rodgers organ was installed. The console sits on casters and can be moved to the center of the chancel for organ performance. Someday we may reinstall pipes to create a hybrid of acoustic and electronic sound.

History

Among items of interest in other areas of the building are the ink drawings, a

photograph and painting of the first building owned by First Presbyterian Church. Built in 1876, it was located on the northeast corner of Second South and Second East. Its wood frame structure was typical of many churches in the west, often referred to as prairie churches. It served the congregation for 31 years. The Collegiate Institute of Salt Lake – now known as Westminster College – was begun in the basement of that building.

In various hallways and rooms of the church are displayed many of the documents relating to the founding of this congregation. You will also find the photograph of Carlisle Cathedral (in the Library), the building which inspired architect Walter Ware in the design of this building. You will note in the newspaper articles that even in 1902 it was necessary for a building such as this to have a patron in the form of a major giver. Such a patron, Mr. Thomas Weir, occupied the building north of the church and was a lifelong participant and elder in the life of this congregation.

In fact, in the early days of the church, his young son Ben would disappear from the family home and could be found next door playing church. Ben grew up to become a Presbyterian minister. Dr. Benjamin Weir was on the faculty of American University of Beirut in Lebanon and held hostage for 177 days in 1985. Not long after his release the Presbyterian Church elected Dr. Weir to its national office, as moderator of General Assembly.

Pictured in one hallway are the former pastors of First Presbyterian Church. We have had two pastors who had other family members also serve the church: in one case a son and the other a grandson. The Rev. Walter Kalvesmaki pastored from 1961-74 and his son the Rev. Ken Kalvesmaki later served as an Assistant Pastor. Dr. Donald Baird who pastored from 1984-95, was the grandson of Rev. Jesse Baird who served this pulpit from 1928-31.

Education was strongly supported by Presbyterians, and when Utah began its public schools in the early part of the 20th century, 41 Presbyterian mission schools were turned over to the state to help begin public education in Utah. Of those mission schools, one remains active as a private school. It is Wasatch Academy in Mt. Pleasant, Utah, whose students come from across the United States. Though no longer operated as a mission school, individual Presbyterians continue to support scholarships at that institution.

Community Groups

Many of the spaces in this building are used by community groups providing a variety of services and opportunities. One of particular interest to the broader community is Boy Scout Troop #34 that uses the youth room on the lower level. Troop #34 has been in continuous operation over 80 years. Its number designates not the 34th Troop in Utah, but the 34th Troop west of the Mississippi River. Its long history has included many men and women who have served faithfully not only in our congregation, but in the community-at-large. One of the Silver Beavers awarded to an adult leader went to Edmund Day. He was one of the two gentlemen who brought the YMCA to Salt Lake City in the early years of this century.

The Day family served this congregation for many years and Dr. Dorothy Day, daughter of Edmund, helped compile the history of this church in celebration of its centennial in 1971. She often told of the Sunday in the spring of 1905 when the entire congregation marched from their old building at 200S and 200E to the “new” church on C Street – a grand procession nearly a thousand strong with music and joyful singing, all the folks decked out in their summer finery.

Summary

To sit or pray quietly in the sanctuary, as students and tourists often do on their walking tours of South Temple, is an opportunity to be ministered to by the messages of the stained glass masterpieces. Or you are welcome to explore other areas of the church that are used for ministry and mission here at First Presbyterian Church.

Visit our website: www.fpcslc.org for information about Sunday worship services, music program, concerts, community projects, etc.

First Presbyterian Church

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fpcslc.org, 801-363-3889

Office hours: T – Fri 9 am – 4 pm

