

## Eagle Brook Church 2022 First Baptist Church 1885, 1923

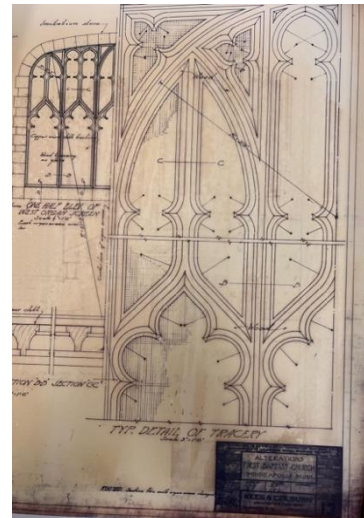
Winston Churchill once said, “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.” In saying this, he was pointing to the power of what a building comes to mean in our personal lives and what we do through it for the good of others. This is a truth that has been lived out for years through First Baptist Church in Minneapolis.

First Baptist Church, at 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Harmon Place, was designed by architects Frederick Kees and Burnham Fisk. It was built of Kasota Limestone, in a blend of Romanesque and Gothic Revival Style. The large tracery window between the two towers is evidence of Gothic revival style. This window is ninety-six feet high and thirty feet wide and was recognized as the largest tracery window of its kind.

The *Minneapolis Journal* reported on December 19, 1886, that the building had been set on an irregularly shaped lot, with dimensions of 1,222 by 165 feet. There are five entrances to the main auditorium. The auditorium is eighty-four feet square and fifty feet high, with large stained-glass windows on three sides. *The Journal* noted that the sanctuary, with a seating capacity of 1,400, had “a groined ceiling, is brilliant frescoing in color and design and all of its interior wood is of cherry.”



*Hennepin County Library*



*Tracery Window Design*

The total cost of this church structure was \$175,000. When dedicated in 1886, the building was debt free.

This was First Baptist’s third building and third location in Minneapolis. Just as the business center of Minneapolis moved westward from its birthplace by St. Anthony Falls and the Mississippi River, so did First Baptist. From 1853, First Baptist was a significant partner in the city’s development.

In 1852, following an order by U.S. President Millard Fillmore, Fort Snelling Military Reservation released the land that Minneapolis was built upon, and the rush to settlement began. On March 6, 1853, Asa Fletcher invited a group of five men and five women to his home to organize a Baptist church for the village of Minneapolis.

In the months that followed, the members of First Baptist began meeting regularly. Their initial primary meeting place was in a crude, two-story, wood building located at the foot of Second Avenue South and the Mississippi River. The access to this first meeting place at the riverfront was up a flight of stairs, so fragile in appearance that it was a relief to arrive at the top or bottom. The church's furnishings were sparse, seating was on wooden planks, and the pulpit was made from rough wood. After outgrowing their initial space, First Baptist moved briefly to a second meeting location at Fletcher Hall, on the corner of Second Street and Second Avenue South.



*Hennepin County Library - Minneapolis from the corner of Washington and Second. 1857*



*1857 First Suspension Bridge at Hennepin Hennepin County Library*

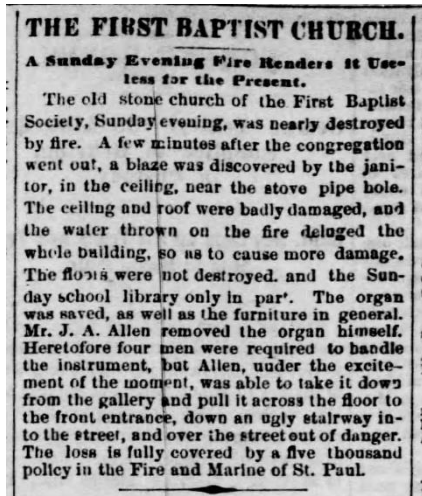
Four years after First Baptist began, land was donated by H.G. Welles for the construction of their first dedicated building, a yellow brick church, at Nicollet and Third Street. These were extremely difficult years for the church and the country. The financial Panic of 1857, along with the Civil War, brought strife and loss. A storm in 1864 added to First Baptist's difficulties, damaging their building enough that by 1865, it could no longer be used. Instead of rebuilding at the same location, the congregation exchanged sites for one at Hennepin and Fifth Street South.

As an observer noted in 1867, "One of the interesting things, to me, a church man, was the movement of the churches in those days, people walked or had horses and carriages, but most everybody walked. This meant everything had to be as near to the homes as possible. The churches were all downtown. We had only one Catholic church at that time, which was on Third Street. St. Marks was on Fourth Street and Hennepin. The Baptist church was on Fifth Street and Hennepin. The Presbyterian church and the Plymouth Congregational church were on Fourth Street. When they began to move, they didn't dare to move very far, or they would get out in the country. "



*First Baptist Church at Fifth Street and Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis. Created by William H. Jacoby in 1878. Minnesota Historical Society*

For the next fourteen years, First Baptist was located at Hennepin and Fifth Street South. These were years of tremendous expansion and growth. By 1876, the church doubled the size of its building. The businesses of the city were booming along Hennepin Avenue. This made the location of First Baptist prized property. In 1883, the church sold its building, and the Lumber Exchange Building took its place.



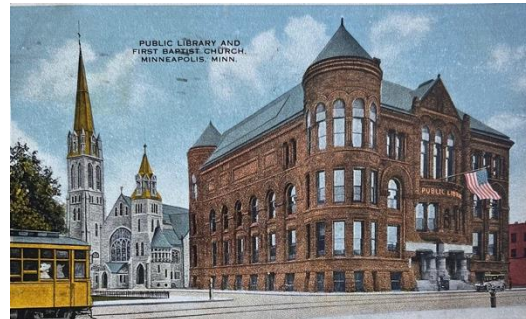
*Minneapolis Star Tribune, Jan. 18, 1857*

The *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, on July 16, 1891, noted that “Hennepin Ave. became a bustling center of commerce, retail and office buildings, and was a desired location for the Lumber exchange Building. As the business center of the city kept expanding, the steepled churches dotting the downtown began finding room in the residential areas.”

In 1883, the Mayor of Minneapolis, George Pillsbury, laid the cornerstone for the new First Baptist building which would take three years to build. Without a place to meet, First Baptist met at the Pence Opera House on Hennepin, until May 1885, when the new lecture hall was ready for occupancy.

In May 1885, the church was able to begin occupancy of the 4,648 square foot two-story lecture hall. The lecture room on the main floor was built with the capability of expansion. By opening the surrounding classrooms for additional seating, the combined space could accommodate eight hundred people. Above the classrooms and lecture hall there was a kitchen, ladies’ parlors, dining room, and pastors’ study.

In 1883, First Baptist began building at Tenth and Harmon Place, a residential neighborhood. This began to change in 1886, with the groundbreaking of the new Minneapolis Public Library. The library was completed in 1889 and remained next door until 1961. A parking lot is in its place today.



*First Baptist Church and First Minneapolis Public Library - Postcard, 1889*

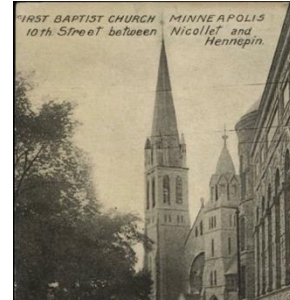
In the four years from 1885 to 1889, Minneapolis’ infrastructure grew rapidly. The first hydroelectric station in the U.S. began supplying waterpower at St. Anthony Falls in 1882. By 1889, the street railway system electrified its first line, and by Dec. 23, 1889, the first electric streetcar was in use.

In 1889, 4,500 new buildings were constructed in Minneapolis at a cost of \$10 million, twenty-three miles of water main and five miles of sewer line were put in, sixty miles of sidewalk laid,



and fifty-two miles of street were graded. The city occupied twenty-four square miles. In 1889, Minneapolis was a city of one hundred sixty-five thousand people.

Building additions were needed to keep up with First Baptist's continued growth. In 1923, Jackson Hall was built to satisfy the increased need for education space. Jackson Hall was built with forty-six classrooms and seven offices. At the same time, a remodel of the existing auditorium space was completed. 1923 also marked the seventieth anniversary of First Baptist Church.



*Dedication -1924  
Hennepin County Library*

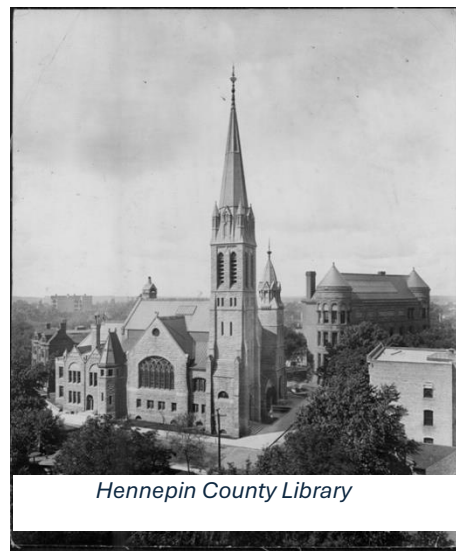


*Jackson Hall - Hennepin County Library*

The University of Northwestern St. Paul is a lasting reminder of the vision and influence of First Baptist Church. It was founded by William Bell Riley, a well-known pastor of First Baptist. Classes began in 1902, at First Baptist Church, with seven students, and by 1923, Northwestern filled the classrooms of the newly built Jackson Hall. The University of Northwestern moved to its present 107-acre St. Paul campus in 1972. During a brief four-year tenure, 1948-1952, Northwestern's second president, Reverend Billy Graham launched the KTIS radio station from its location at Jackson Hall.

First Baptist had significant impact throughout the Twin Cities as it branched out with mission churches. In the last decades of the Nineteenth Century, fourteen churches were started serving immigrants brought to First Baptist church from Sweden, Norway, and Western and Northern European countries.

The Northern Pacific Railroad provided seven Chapel Cars equipped for the purpose of starting churches along the rail lines. As a direct result, over seventy churches were started with this ministry out of First Baptist.



*Hennepin County Library*

First Baptist reached its peak in 1935. As the shift in population moved to the suburbs, attendance began to decline. In 2022, it became Eagle Brook's eleventh campus site.

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Eagle Brook opened its doors to over 2,000 people, welcoming downtown Minneapolis into the second life of First Baptist Church.



*Elkman - Wikimedia commons*



Eagle Brook has reinvigorated many historic aspects of this church building. It renovated its auditorium and balcony seating, maintaining the original design and look. It remodeled the children's and administrative spaces, added a café, rebuilt

its welcome spaces, and brought in new projection, sound, lighting, and audio-visual systems.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/eagle-brook-church-expanding-downtown-minneapolis/>