

99 14th Street
Agape Baptist Church/First Church of Christ, Scientist Church

This building was designed by architect E. Edward Wolfe of Sandusky, Ohio, and built in 1926 to serve the congregation of the First Church of Christ, Scientist. The church itself had been organized in Wheeling in 1906, and members included some of the Stifel family. The building has a blond brick façade with Doric columns lining the entryway and stone sills that support opaque geometric windows.



The original building was noted for the indirect lighting in the main auditorium that provided soft, mellow light. Gray and ivory were the color schemes, and a Byzantine mosaic, designed by Francis V. Boyce, adorned the domed ceiling. The woodwork and pews were done in walnut, and the floor covering was taupe. The pipe organ was described as having “beautiful tone quality.”

The Church of Christ, Scientist was originally founded in 1879 by New England native Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910). Eddy claimed a personal healing that had occurred in 1866 as the result of reading the Bible. Christian Scientists believe that prayer is effective in healing, and the Church has reportedly collected more than 50,000 testimonials of incidents that it considers healing through Christian Science treatment alone. There are no specific clergy in the church. Rather, two “Readers” read aloud a proscribed weekly Lesson-Sermon that is delivered in all Christian Science churches worldwide and is studied by individuals at home throughout the preceding week. “To be elected the First Reader in one’s branch church is one of the highest and most important positions the lay Christian Scientist may aspire to.”

By 1992, the building no longer served the First Church of Christ, Scientist and was purchased to house the Agape Baptist Church. Rev. Willie Stinson (Wheeling Hall of Fame, Class of 2019) led the congregation, whose name, “agape” came from the Greek New Testament Bible, meaning “God-like love.” A former semi-pro football player with the Wheeling Ironmen and U.S. Army veteran, Rev. Stinson was known for working with young people in the church’s youth center, counseling challenged youth, and mentoring both single and married adults. “Under his leadership, the church completely renovated the building, established essential ministries, and reached out in mission to the neighborhood.” He also founded the Black Ministerial Alliance in Wheeling in 1997 to foster cooperation among African-American clergy and their congregations.

Rev. Stinson died in late 2018, and the church building was sold in the spring of 2020. In early 2022, it was listed for sale for \$350K.

Prepared by Jeanne Finstein, Friends of Wheeling, February 19, 2022

Sources:

- Ohio County Public Library
- Wheeling Hall of Fame booklet
- *Wheeling Intelligencer*
- Wikipedia

Photo by Joanne Sullivan