

Fourth Street Methodist Church Methodist Building

The original Fourth Street Methodist Church was formed in 1785, as the first Methodist organization and the first church of any denomination in Wheeling. Rev. Wilson Lee became the first pastor – just three years after the final Battle of Fort Henry.

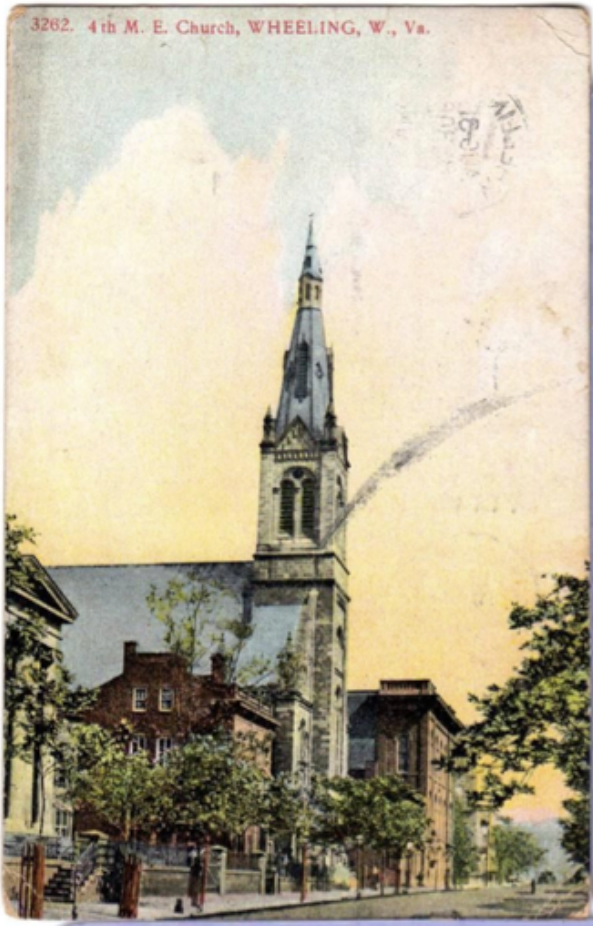
The first organizational meeting was held in the home of Ebenezer Zane, which was located near the current 11th & Main Streets. Ebenezer's wife, Elizabeth McColloch Zane, was the first member of the little Methodist class. She reportedly became a "power for righteousness and was zealous and pious."

The congregation built its first building, 33 years later, in 1818 on ground donated by Noah Zane, on the "fourth street from the river," now known as Chapline Street. The one-room, brick building was located to the north of the current First Presbyterian Church – about where the McLure parking garage is now located. The original trustees were John McColloch, Asabel Booth, John List, Jr., Abraham McColloch, Richard Carter, and Daniel Zane. Membership numbered about 30.



Following a successful revival meeting during the winter of 1831-32, membership grew to 273, and it became apparent that the church building was too small. The second church building, with a seating capacity for some 2000 people, was completed by February 1836 on the same site. Wheeling was incorporated as a city the same year. With such a large seating capacity, the auditorium became a rallying place not only for Methodism but also for large secular events. Perhaps the most well known event held in the second building was a performance by famed singer Jenny Lind during her visit to Wheeling in 1851. The famous showman P.T. Barnum was paid \$5000 for this one recital. Seats were sold at auction, with tailor Michael Imhoff making the first bid of \$250 (the equivalent of over \$7000 today).

While repairs were being done to the building in 1866, it was discovered that the walls and foundation of the church had settled and that it would be necessary to rebuild. The congregation's third building, of Norman design, was dedicated on May 15, 1870, on the same site as the prior buildings. Extensive improvements were made in 1948, but in 1949 serious damage to the building occurred during the erection of a business on the adjacent lot to the south, and the church was declared unsafe.



c. 1909 postcard, showing the third building

The congregation then purchased its current location, in the building formerly called the Fidelity Building, for \$215,000. Erected in 1937-38, the Fidelity Building afforded ample facilities for a modern church program. The first services were held in building on January 1, 1951, and the structure was renamed the Methodist Building.



The exterior of the building is of Indiana limestone, with dark granite facings along the lower front entrance. The front lobby has walls of Tennessee Tavernelle marble, set on a base of green Tinos marble from Greece. A paneled effect is achieved by the use of both light and dark marble on all walls of the foyer. Visible in the marble above the inner lobby door are two fossil shells. The floors in the lobby and corridors are terrazzo. A specially designed staircase features a pressed bronze railing with silver-like metal ships spaced evenly along the handrail. The risers are tile block of Moorish design. Rare woods were used extensively throughout the building.

Rowland M. Johnson was the architect; he also designed Commencement Hall at Bethany College. The George A. Fuller Company served as contractors; other work credited to the Fuller Company includes the Lincoln Memorial, Arlington Memorial, the U.S. Supreme Court Building, and the state capitol in Charleston.

Prepared by Jeanne Finstein, Friends of Wheeling
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