

## Calvary Presbyterian Church: The Big Red Church

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### Place of Worship Also Connects to:

- First Presbyterian Church
- North Presbyterian Church
- Immanuel Presbyterian Church
- St. James Episcopal Church

### Historical Overview

Calvary Presbyterian Church of Milwaukee was organized on March 30, 1869, with members from the First Presbyterian and North Presbyterian Churches. Members saw the potential for additional growth on the Westside of the Milwaukee River. This was the first Presbyterian edifice west of the Milwaukee River. As such, Calvary Presbyterian soon became a 'mother church' for all other Presbyterian churches on the west side of Milwaukee. Although the cornerstone dates 1870, it was laid on May 10, 1871. The Church dedication was held on March 3, 1872. During the edifice's construction, the congregation met at St James Episcopal Church. The church was the first design of Henry Koch, who later go on to design Turner Hall and the Pfister Hotel. Calvary Presbyterian's gothic style architecture, constructed with cream city brick, and its architectural heritage helped it to become a national landmark in the 1980s.

By the early 1900's, the city had changed, and Calvary Presbyterian went from being the first, stand-alone Presbyterian church on the west side of the city to being one of the cultural and community centers of the city. The church flourished, and influenced by the social gospel, they decided to spread their good fortune. With the help of the Davidson family, the church started a community center, where children were taught and taken care of, as well as providing other services such as helping immigrants to the city learn English and assimilate to their new surroundings. However, by the great depression things had changed and the church ended up in financial turmoil, likely leading to the closer of the community center during this time. It was not until 1942 that the church was able to liquidate their debts. However, disaster would strike when the church's pastor, Dr. John Lewis would ignite the church in flames in 1947. Unable to let tragedy overcome the congregation, the community rebuilt and remodeled the church. In addition, the community built an addition on the church to provide a space for classrooms.

During the late 1960s the church would have to adapt to the changing landscape as the city of Milwaukee decided to add highway 43 just west of the church, which drastically changed the neighborhood. On top of this, nearby Marquette University added a major expansion to their campus, engulfing everything from 11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> street and from Clybourn to Wells. By the 1960s, most residents had moved away from the church due to their homes being torn up either by the highway, or the campus expansion.

In the 1990s it became clear that in order to survive Calvary would have to change from a traditional church to some other kind of institution that could also be used as a community center or events space. This split the congregation, as some of the older and more traditional members did not like the decision to remodel the interior. Those that stayed removed the pews, added surround sound speakers, sails to the center, and a labyrinth. By 1998 the remodel was finished, and the church began holding labyrinth walks, concerts, and other events that a community center provides. Today the church is undergoing a finance campaign in hopes of raising \$2 million dollars for needed interior and exterior repairs. As an open and affirming church, they are hoping to attract a wider audience and more funding.

## Timeline

- 1869- March 30. Calvary Presbyterian Church of Milwaukee was organized on March 30, 1869 with members from the First Presbyterian and North Presbyterian Churches. Rev Edward Graham of Guelph Canada was called to be pastor of the church and accepted the \$2000 salary.
- 1871- May 10. Cornerstone dated 1870.
- 1872- March 3. Official Church dedication. The Church was the first completed building under the direction of Henry Koch. He would later design City Hall, the Pfister, Gesus Church, the Ward Theatre, Chapel at the Old Soldiers Home and the Golda Meir School.
- 1872- Graham resigned because of health in 1872. James Stewart accepted call from Davenport Iowa... health reasons resigned in 1880... {MORE TO COME???
- 1880- John Hale becomes temporary Pastor until Rev A.A. Kiehle of Stillwater Minn. was installed as Calvary's minister in summer of 1881.
- 1887- Church redecoration and new organ installed.1906- Dr. A. A. resigns after serving 25 years.
- 1907- Rev William E. Graham of Oklahoma City served for 2years... pleasantly remembered...
- 1910- Rev James Oaster D. D. of Brooklyn NY succeeded Rev Graham. Oastler served for 18 years. 1910, two story brick addition, 18ftx18ftx20ft erected on South West Corner. Architect for addition may have been Gerret van Pelt.
- 1918- Started the YPSE a community mission. Later known as the Calvary Community House. First quarters were 62 8th street in old store. Also, nursery school and clubs and classes for older children and adults. Large evening class in English carried on until 1826 Then opened house on 95 8th street (Now 521 North 8th Street).
- 1928- Oastler Resigned. Rev W.B. Love came from Sidney OH Many people received into the membership during his four years.
- 1932- Love succeeded by Rev Richard E Evans. Aging church. He brought it youth and new ideas.
- 1935- Church was without a pastor... church lost many members. Heavily in debt and need of many repairs... outlook was not hopeful... Dr John Lewis of Scranton... before London Manchester and Edinburgh. Guest of the city for one night but invited to come back. Lewis leadership helped to bring the church back... church condition... leaky roof, shabby carpet, ceiling falling fortunately when there weren't services.
- 1936- April 5. Henry Marx Chairman of the House Committee reported a campaign to renovate the church building Calvary Church restoration and redecoration. Stain Glass windows restored. Congratulations! Mentions that debt was 30,000 plus the need to 22,000 for repairs... now debt reduced 41,000 to 10,500 Board of Trustees and Women's Auxiliary praised for their efforts.
- 1948- January 8. Calvary Presbyterian Church Fire. Arson.
- 1948- March 17. Repairs to Nave, Nave Roof, and rebuilding of sanctuary was completed after the fire.
- 1957- Milwaukee Architect Fritz von Grossman designed two-story brick school and small elevator wing near the northeast corner of the church.
- 1986- Calvary Presbyterian Church is placed on the National Register of Historical Places.

- 1994- Inner Sanctuary was Redesigned. The pews were removed from the church and a 42-foot labyrinth was installed. This labyrinth mirrors the labyrinth in Chartres, France. Sails are also hung from the ceiling.
- 2008- Calvary begins conversations on how to raise funds to restore the Church building. Consulting with WAVE (Wisconsin Ave Churches) to provide a space for multiple parishes.
- 2012- April 24. Publication of the Final Report, "The *What's Next* Committee of the Milwaukee Presbytery." Presentation to the congregation. Mentions declining membership and five church closings between 2005-2010. Hopefully that Milwaukee Presbytery will survive.

### Annotated Bibliography

*Milwaukee Daily News* (1880-1920)

Calvary's prominence in Milwaukee as a wealthy church in a premier residential district allowed its activities to be picked up by the local newspapers. Local newspapers like the MDN has lots of information related to events held at the church, weekly sermon topics, and changes in the church's leaderships.

Church Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Mss-1867.

The Milwaukee County Historical Society has a box with nine folders related to Calvary Presbyterian Church. The materials are scarce, but there are various meeting notes that give some information of the ways the Calvary Congregation interacted with each other and with others outside of the community. In addition, there are a number of church bulletins. *The Church Messenger* - A few newspaper articles are included in one of the folders. It would be nice to find more of these. MCHS also has an extensive photo collection. It would be nice to see if they have pictures from the neighborhood/church at different times in the church's history.

Calvary Presbyterian Archive, Calvary Presbyterian Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 628 North 10<sup>th</sup> Street.

The archive is a vault located inside the church near the offices. Recent information on the church involves fundraising to maintain the church structure. Some information on the 1920s that speaks about Milwaukee Presbyterians efforts to build additional churches and expand membership in the various locations. Description of the plans for the 1956/57 church addition plans and remodeling projects. Church Bulletins. Some of the church materials are also maintained by the Wisconsin Historical Society. For example, *The Days of Our Years: Calvary Presbyterian Church, 1869-1939 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Bulletin*. Bulletin gives a chronological report of various happenings during the first 50 years.