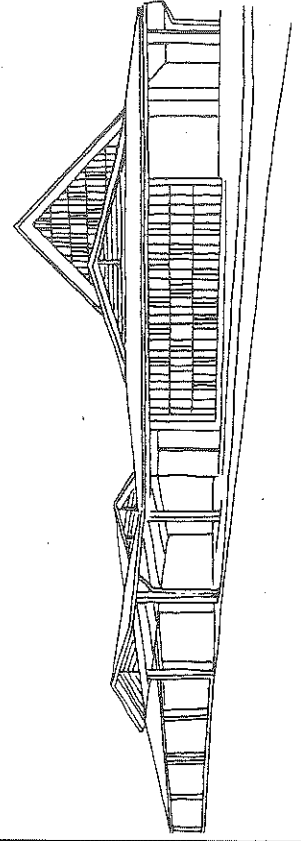


A Historical Sketch of

First Church of Christ, Scientist

446 Clairmont Avenue

Decatur, Georgia



Formative Years

"If God be for us, who can be against us? If He be with us, the wayside is a sanctuary, and the desert a resting place peopled with living witnesses of the fact that 'God is Love.'"

Miscellaneous Writings, pg. 150

"Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord."

Haggai 1:8

These two citations were uppermost in the thoughts of a small band of Christian Scientists who met February 26, 1929, for the purpose of discussing the organization of a Christian Science Society in Decatur, Georgia. As a result of this historic meeting, it was voted by the majority of those present to hold the first church service on March 3, 1929.

A small auditorium, which had just been vacated by the Episcopal Church of Decatur, was rented at 202 Trinity Place. A Sunday School was begun shortly afterwards, with classes held prior to church services since the same auditorium accommodated both.

*"One holy church of God appears
Through every age and race,
Unwasted by the lapse of years,
Unchanged by changing place."*

The Christian Science Hymnal,
Hymn 261

Society and Church Status Granted

Recognition as an established society came from The Board of Directors of The Mother Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts, in August 1929. Wednesday evening testimony meetings were conducted from the earliest days of the society's existence.

The first lecture was given by Paul A. Harsch, C.S.B., on February 9, 1930, in the former DeKalb Theatre on Ponce de Leon Avenue, thus beginning the offering of an annual lecture to the community. In the early 1950's, the church expanded the gift to two yearly lectures, a practice which has continued through the years.

A Reading Room with a lending library was opened in the church building July 1931. Such momentous steps of progress were accomplished by this dedicated group of ten charter members in a seventeen month period!

The Trinity Place site proved a harmonious and suitable one for services until

it was sold in January 1936.

A church member who was first secretary of the Decatur Federal Savings and Loan Building was instrumental in obtaining the society's next location. On January 1, 1936, the members moved to a hall on the mezzanine floor of the bank (at the corner of Sycamore and McDonough streets) and continued holding services there until the spring of 1949.

Growth in interest and attendance necessitated renting separate space for the Sunday School. This need was filled by securing available space in the Decatur Recreational Center beginning January 1947.

Another milestone occurred in October 1937, when the Christian Science Board of Directors in Boston granted branch church status to the society which from that time forward was to be known as First Church of Christ, Scientist, Decatur, Georgia. Incorporation under the laws of the State of Georgia was completed in December 1939.

Church Home Realized

Enthusiasm for a church home of its own had been a cherished hope growing within the membership. As a step of unfoldment, the church purchased lots on West Ponce de Leon at Water Street. Since public transportation did not serve this area at that time, the church later sold the lots.

A more desirable location surfaced when the Laurence Everhart residence at 446 Clairmont Avenue was placed on the market. The building committee unanimously declared the small white colonial style house suitable to the needs of the church. However, one factor posed a challenge -- the house was in a section where zoning was restricted to residential property. Despite this barrier, the membership, at a business meeting, was led to purchase the property, feeling that eventually zoning permission could be obtained, but, if not, the property could be sold for more than the asking price.

The attorney for the church ruled that church money could not be used for speculative purposes since donations to this fund had been made for building a church edifice. To resolve the matter, a church member bought the property. After the zoning ordinance changed, the

member sold the property back to the church at the same price. This transaction took place in April 1948, and cleared the way for moving forward with renovation. Hence, the church acquired two deeds.

Remodeling of the house provided a church auditorium, a Reading Room closed off from the auditorium by a folding door, a board room bordered by four small cubicles for the Readers and musicians, a nursery, and a committee room. A limited parking area was augmented by parking on the street in front of the church. A cottage at the rear of the parking lot became the Sunday School.

While enjoying the benefits of a larger church structure, but keeping in mind the possibility of future expansion, the membership on September 1, 1953, bought an adjoining lot known as the B. Hugh Burgess property. With the passing of years, the wisdom of this acquisition proved a blessing when readiness for a complete new structure presented itself.

Continued growth made it imperative to "Enlarge the place of thy tent..." (Isaiah 54:2). Consequently, the auditorium was extended April 1954, by utilizing the area occupied

New Horizons

by the Reading Room. This area did double duty until the Reading Room was moved to 125 Sycamore Street on the Decatur Square in November 1954. While located here, the librarian and staff made concerted efforts to close the gaps in obtaining missing back issues of the Christian Science Journal and Sentinel. This goal required much time and incurred some expense but resulted in bringing the periodicals collection up to near completion.

Shortly after the auditorium was enlarged, the membership was able to purchase a one manual, half pedalboard electric organ that had served as an interim instrument in a local church while its organ

was undergoing rebuilding. This step proved a boon to the Sunday School which inherited the Chickering grand piano formerly used for church services. This lovely piano, built in 1941, still faithfully supplies the music needs of the Sunday School.

The Sunday School enlarged its bounds during April and May 1955, by doubling its floor space (through the extension of the rear wall), thus eliminating the need of holding two sessions. From that date, it has held one session simultaneous with the church session. Enlargement of the parking lot followed suit in June 1955, the result of working out an agreeable plan with the next door church neighbors.

"Although walking through deep waters, the little Church went steadily on, increasing in numbers, at every epoch saying, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.'"

Manual, pg. 18: 7-11

The above citation of Mary Baker Eddy describes so prophetically the church's experience in every succeeding step of progress. From an initial mortgage in 1948 of \$20,000, the membership retired the indebtedness in eight years. Dedication services were held on Sunday, November 29, 1959, at 11:00 a.m., 3:30 and 7:30 p.m.

As the church grew, filling both the edifice and the Sunday School to capacity, the members gave prayerful thought for direction and guidance. Inspirational meetings were conducted through the early months of 1961 for the purpose of involving and informing everyone in all preplanning stages. These meetings systematically led to drawing up realistic financial arrangements, appointing a five-person building committee, and in September 1961, engaging the Atlanta architectural firm of Finch, Alexander, Barnes, Rothschild, and

Paschal, Inc., to develop specifications for a new structure. It was voted to accept a design using separate structures for the church and Sunday School which would face each other across a covered entrance portico and paved walkway leading to the parking area. Rogers Construction Company of Atlanta was the contractor.

During the razing of the existing buildings in early 1962 and the subsequent rearing of the new ones, Sunday services were conducted nearby at Clairmont Elementary School on Erie Avenue. Wednesday testimony meetings were held in a ground floor auditorium of the DeKalb Federal Savings and Loan Association at 116 Clairmont Avenue. Two church members stored usable church properties in their basement. Non-usable items were sold at a basement sale augmented by household contributions from church members, the proceeds of which went to the building fund.

With construction nearing completion, a cornerstone ceremony was held in August 1963, in conformity with a format sent from The Mother Church. Members of the executive board and building committee, the clerk, a representa-

tive from the architectural firm, and a brick mason attended the event. Gathered at the front door under the covered portico, the chairman of the building committee read briefly from the Bible and *Science and Health*, followed by The Lord's Prayer. A packet containing a copy of the Bible, *Science and Health*, *The Christian Science Monitor* of that date, a *Christian Science Sentinel*, a *Christian Science Journal*, and the church history was placed in the cornerstone cavity and sealed in everyone's presence. This cornerstone bears the date of 1963 and is situated to the right of the front doors of the church.

"The praiseworthy success of this church, and its united efforts to build an edifice in which to worship the infinite, sprang from the temples erected first in the hearts of its members — the unselfed love that builds without hands, eternal in the heaven of Spirit. God grant that this unity remain, and that you continue to build, rebuild, adorn, and fill these spiritual temples with grace, Truth, Life, and Love."

The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and
Miscellany, pg. 195

This citation appeared in the invitation to an 11:00 a.m. and an 8:00 p.m. service which opened the doors of our beautiful new church-Sunday, September 1, 1963. Although the balcony and partitioning of the Sunday School classes awaited completion at a later date, it was an occasion for joy and gratitude. For the first time there was sufficient space to accommodate future lectures. The installation of a two-manual Allen electronic organ with full pedalboard lent beauty and dignity to the music. Landscaping the grounds gave color, form, and beauty to the outdoor scene.

To undertake this ambitious building project, the members had assumed a 20 year mortgage of \$125,000 plus over \$34,000 in personal loans. Through prayer and diligence the mortgage was cleared in 13 years and the personal notes repaid in 10 years. With great rejoicing, the church was dedicated Sunday, December 14, 1975, in services held at 11:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m., and 7:00 p.m.

In accordance with the *Manual of The Mother Church* by Mary Baker Eddy, Article XXI, Section 1, that each church of the Christian Science denomi-

nation shall have a Reading Room, First Church of Christ, Scientist, Decatur, has maintained a Reading Room from its early years. The Reading Room has occupied various locations since its initial establishment, with each move unfolding in response to prayer and research to provide a site accessible to the area it serves. To date, it has opened its doors in welcoming the community at the following addresses:

1. 202 Trinity Place (July 1931-Dec. 1935)
2. Mezzanine floor, Decatur

- Federal Savings & Loan Building, corner of Sycamore and McDonough Streets (Jan. 1936-April 1948)
3. Church edifice, 446 Clairmont Avenue (April 1948-Nov. 1954)
4. 125 Sycamore Street on the Decatur Square (Nov. 1954-1965)
5. 117 Clairmont Avenue (1965-1972)
6. West Court Square (1972-July 1987)
7. 100 Ponce de Leon Place (July 1987-)

The Years Ahead

The ensuing years have witnessed numerous changes and challenges. The balcony has been completed in keeping with initial plans.

In 1979 property with a residence at 615 Ponce de Leon Place became available. It abutted the church parking lot and seemed ideal for providing needed expansion for a parking facility. After investigation to determine if the church was in compliance with city codes, the property was purchased May 1, 1979, from Dr. Lester A. Brown for \$31,000. Only after the house had been demolished was an ordinance discovered which

halted plans. By paving the lot, drainage from rainfall would adversely affect the adjoining residences. Until the problem is resolved, the lot must remain unpaved. This mortgage was paid off July 20, 1984.

In late 1982, the quadruplex next door to the church at 448 Clairmont Avenue went on the market. This property belonged to Mary Louise Bennett and was handled by the First National Bank. To protect the church from any future detracting use and to provide a source of rental income, the membership voted to purchase the property for \$132,000. This

transaction took place December 28, 1982, with the mortgage retired January 31, 1986.

Still another real estate parcel with a two story house became available in late 1985 at 450 Clairmont Avenue. Acquisition of this parcel would extend the boundary of church owned property all the way from the church edifice to the corner of Ponce de Leon Place. Consequently, this property, belonging to Dr. Lester A. Brown, was purchased January 1, 1986, for \$130,000, after a generous outpouring of financial contributions and loans from members. The house was rented as a one-family dwelling after substantial refurbishment. Members, working in shifts, supplemented the efforts of contract workers for a period of

several weeks to put the house in a rentable condition.

The Mother Church instigated a Global Lecture Preparatory Meeting for all Christian Science churches and societies world-wide on September 24, 1987, for the purpose of beaming via satellite a video program designed to enlarge and enhance the outreach of lecture activity. First Church of Christ, Scientist, Decatur, was selected as one of many host churches, and in this capacity welcomed attendance from seven Georgia churches and societies. In each church, the filmed portion was followed by discussion on ways to make lectures more meaningful and stimulating on the local scene.

Forging Onward

We cannot envision what new frontiers await the advancement of the Christian Science movement and its churches, but we can prayerfully join our voices in living Mary Baker Eddy's statement in *The First Church of Christ, Scientist and Miscellany*, page 245:

"Let the voice of Truth and Love be heard above the dire din of mortal nothingness, and the majestic march of Christian Science go on ad infinitum, praising God, doing the works of primitive Christianity, and enlightening the world."

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