

### Early McAlester Methodists

The town of McAlester began as a trading post founded by J.J. McAlester along the Shawnee Road in Indian Territory in 1869. In 1872 the Katy Railroad reached the site, and the town (present day North McAlester) began to blossom. In 1888, an east-west railroad was built south of McAlester's general store and the present day center of downtown McAlester grew-up at the intersection of the two railroads. North and South McAlester operated as two separate communities until Oklahoma statehood in 1907 when the US Congress refused to recognize them as separate towns.



In 1874, Methodists in North McAlester began meeting in box cars and brush arbors. In 1889, a white frame church was built at Stonewall and Ash

In 1891, James F. Holden, an officer of the Choctaw Railway Company and a Methodist, built an interdenominational house of worship at what is now the corner of Carl Albert Parkway and 1st Street. North and South Methodists shared space with the Baptists and Presbyterians, each taking a different Sunday of the month. For a fifth Sunday, an Episcopal Bishop from Oklahoma Territory would preside. The Catholics held Mass every Sunday at 6 am under the direction of the priest at Krebs. In 1894, the railroad sold the building to the Baptists, and so the other denominations organized and began construction on their own houses of worship.



McAlester's interdenominational house of worship ca. 1900

### **Barnett Memorial & Christ UMC**

In 1912, an endowment by J.A. and Amelia Barnett allowed for the construction of a new church building to replace the white frame church built in 1889 at the corner of Stonewall and Ash in North McAlester. The structure was "gun-metal brick with a red tile roof, Gothic style windows of Florentine glass with stained glass windows gracing the front." It was named Barnett Memorial.



*Barnett Memorial commemorative plate from 1973*

In 1973, under the guidance of pastor Rev. Gene Hunt, the aging building, which was suffering structural issues, was replaced by a metal structure and renamed Christ United Methodist Church.



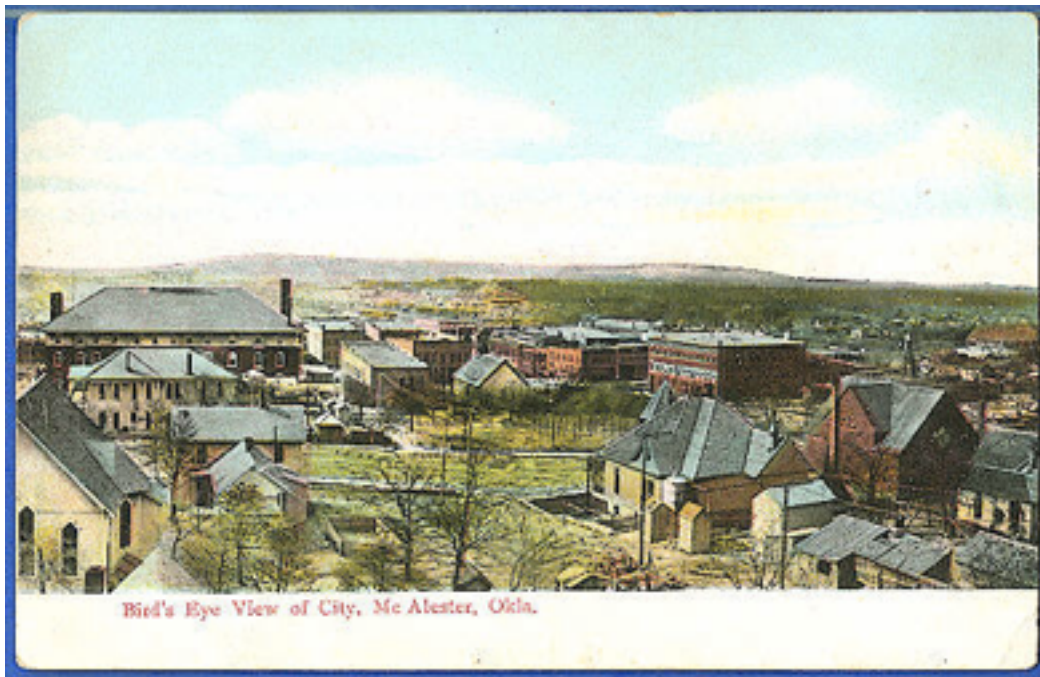
After years of dwindling membership, in May 2013 the congregation of Christ UMC voted to dissolve. Several members of Christ UMC are currently members of McAlester First UMC.

## Mary Phillips & Bowman

Methodism blossomed in the McAlester area in 1894 and 1895 when the community church built by the railroad dissolved and the Northern and Southern Methodists began offering weekly services.

In 1894, Bowman Methodist Episcopal Church was organized and dedicated by Bishop Bowman of the Methodist Episcopal Church. A session of the Oklahoma Annual Conference, with Bishop John H. Vincent presiding, was held in the church about 1895.

The church later became the First Methodist Episcopal Church, located at 2nd & Washington, and lists among its pastors: Rev. F.T. Blackmore, Rev. Pine, Rev. Creasy, Rev. W.H. Talmage, Rev. Mallory, Rev. Cission, Rev. George I. Fenn, Rev. Gene LaGrone, Rev. Carpenter, Rev. Collier, Rev. V.A. Hargis, and Rev. C.R. Wade.



First Methodist Episcopal can be seen in the left foreground of this picture postcard from 1908.

The Southern Methodists organized under Rev. J.M. Porter. They began meeting in the school building directly across the street from Bowman M.E.C. The Southern Church was chartered on February 28, 1895. In 1896 construction began on the Mary Phillips Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church, South at 211 W. Grand Avenue (modern day Carl Albert Parkway). Its pastors were: Rev. Porter, J.H. Ball, S.F. Goddard, N.L. Linebaugh, W.M. Rippey, J.A. Frazier, J.A. Parks, W.S. Dunkle, J.E. Carpenter, W.V. Whitt, Walter Douglass, A.L. Bowman, and R.C. Taylor.



*Mary Phillips Methodist Episcopal Church, South*

## Grand Avenue

By the early 1920s, the membership of Mary Phillips M.E.C.S. was outgrowing its space. Several churches in the community were already making plans to replace their wooden structures with grander brick edifices. The cornerstone of Grand Avenue ME Church South was laid in 1922 and the first Service was held in the new sanctuary on January 6, 1924.



*Grand Avenue as it appeared in 1924 and in a picture postcard from the 1940s*

In 1925 the congregations of Mary Phillips and First Methodist Episcopal United, anticipating the Methodist Union of 1939. This was done under the leadership of Dr. Potts, District Superintendent and C.R. Wade, Pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and Rev. J.H. Ball, Presiding Elder, and Harold J. Cook, Pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Reverend J.H. Ball served as the first pastor of the United church with A.N. Avery as Presiding Elder. The new church became known as Grand Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

The first baby to be baptized in Grand Avenue Methodist Church was Emma Rebecca Tinch Ramsey, Easter Sunday, April 13, 1924, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C.S. Tinch.

Grand Avenue played a prominent role in Oklahoma Methodism and hosted the Eastern Oklahoma Annual Conference in 1924, 1940, and 1948.

In 1957 the church was modernized with central heat and air conditioning. In 1973 the Sanctuary was renovated and an elevator was added from Epworth Hall to the Sanctuary. The balcony was removed, as were the three sections of fifty-year-old auditorium seats. They were replaced with two rows of padded pews. A drop ceiling with recessed lights changed the shape of the ceiling from flat to curved. Even the organ screen behind the altar was changed. The stained glass windows are the only original feature of the sanctuary.

Additional renovations since '73 included a new office entry in 1989, a second elevator servicing all four floors in 2003, a remodel of the Youth Floor in 2005, and a complete remodel of the nursery in 2006.

In 2008, the congregation of Grand Avenue UMC began to discuss plans for the future. Through a series of cottage meetings and discussions conducted by recently appointed pastor



Dr. Charles Neff, it was determined that the congregation saw the need to build a family life center in order to expand ministry and attract new families. After bids to remodel and expand Grand Avenue proved too costly to pursue, it was decided to investigate relocation and new construction. To those ends, Grand Avenue merged with Wesley UMC (at the corner of South 13th & MacArthur Lane) on January 1, 2009 for the purpose of constructing a new church facility at that location.

By 2010, a plan to build a new 22,000 square foot structure to house a family life center, classrooms, youth space, and church offices was decided upon with an estimated cost of \$2.6 million. Ground was broken in December 2010 and the building was completed two years later right on budget and with a debt of only \$400,000.

With the construction on the new facility complete, the final service at Grand Avenue was held on the morning of December 16, 2012 with Rev. Darrell Cates, McAlester District Superintendent presiding, and pastors Charles Neff and Chris Symes assisting. Following de-consecration of the space, the congregation took a "family photo" on the church steps and then journeyed across town to their new church home.

Pastors of Grand Avenue have included:

- R.C. Taylor.....1922-1924
- Harold G. Cooke.....1924-1925
- J.H. Ball.....1925-1929
- T.R. Morehead.....1929-1930
- Ernest C. Webb.....1930-1932
- E.A. Reed.....1932-1934
- Dr. John D. Salter.....1934-1936
- W.D. Thompson.....1936-1939
- Dr. Homer Vanderpool.....1939-1943
- Dr. Earl S. Walker.....1943-1948
- Dr. Guy C. Tetirick.....1948-1951
- Paul H. Tripp.....1951-1954
- Dr. W. Carl Clement.....1954-1956
- Dr. Charles E. Simpson.....1956-1960

Littleton Fowler.....1960-1964  
Richard E. Gibbens.....1964-1966  
Dr. R.L. Willingham.....1966-1971  
Rev. Carl Friend      Assoc. Minister  
Dr. Howard Davis.....1971-1973  
John B. Welch.....1973-1978  
LeRoy Sewell.....1978-1981  
Merle Pulver.....1982-1984  
Richard "Dick" House.....1984-1990  
Burrell McNaught.....1990-1993  
Phillip Ware.....1993-2000  
Dr. David Cressman.....2000-2007  
Dr. Charles Neff.....2007-2008

### **Wesley**

On April 24, 1960, with the guidance of District Superintendent Lee Bowles and financial assistance from the McAlester District Board of Missions, Grand Avenue planted a daughter congregation in the neighborhoods of south McAlester at the corner of S. 13th & MacArthur. The congregation came to be known as Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church, named after the founder of Methodism, John Wesley. At annual conference, Bishop Angie Smith appointed A.W. Robinson as the first pastor. A charter membership service was held November 27, 1960 with 46 members. Construction on the church began in May 1961 and the first service in the new building was held February 18, 1962 with Rev. Lee Bowles, District Superintendent and Rev. Elson Hargrove, pastor. Nearly 300 guests attended the open house later that day.



*Wesley United Methodist Church, McAlester*

In September 2008, the members of Wesley UMC were approached by their pastor Lisa Anderson, Grand Avenue pastor Charles Neff, and McAlester District Superintendent Sandy Wylie to consider a merger with Grand Avenue. They agreed to the plan and on October 26, 2008 voted unanimously for the merger. It became official on January 1, 2009.

Services continued at the "Wesley Campus" (as it was now known) until December of 2009 when it was determined that the impending construction would result in removal of the Wesley building from the site. The church building was de-consecrated in September 2010 and razed in February 2011.

Wesley Pastors have included:

A.W. Robinson.....1960  
Elson Hargrove.....1961-1962  
Clayton O. Hughes.....1962-1966  
Harold E. Himes.....1966-  
Paul Longstreth.....-1973  
Thomas J. Richichi.....1973-1975  
Franklin E. George.....1975-1977  
Rex B. Wilkes.....1977-1979  
Luke Storey.....1979-1988  
Terry W. Fox.....1988-1991  
David L. Sanders.....1991-1998  
Lauren K. Shock.....1998-2001



Marcus K. Barnett.....2001-2006

Wendi Neal.....2006-2007

Lisa Anderson.....2007-2008

### **McAlester First UMC**

On January 1, 2009, Grand Avenue UMC and Wesley UMC merged to form "The First United Methodist Church of McAlester," a name that harkens back to our shared history.

After almost two years of design work and planning, ground was broken in December 2010. Construction began the next week and continued until December 2012.

The first service in the new home of First United Methodist Church took place on December 16, 2012. That morning the congregation worshiped for the final time at Grand Avenue. Rev. Darrell Cates, McAlester District Superintendent was on hand to perform the de-consecration ceremony and everyone gathered on the church steps afterwards for one last picture. That afternoon, the new building was consecrated during a worship service featuring both the choir and praise team.

#### Pastors of First UMC McAlester:

Dr. Charles Neff.....2009-2014

Ruth Atterberry, Assoc.....2009-2011

Rev. Chris Symes, Assoc...2011-2015

Dr. Matthew B. Judkins.....2014-present