

The Sesquicentennial Committee  
By Jerry Niebaum

The Sesquicentennial Committee of First Church was appointed by Rev. Sharon Howell and organized in the Summer of 2001. One challenge Rev. Howell presented was to create a written history of First Church for the years 1954 to 2004. After much discussion, we decided to collectively do the research, compilation, and writing of the history, though none of us are formally trained in history or historical research. However, all members of the committee do have long affiliations with First Church, and have their own memories of the past five decades. Each story we shared stimulated new revelations and recollections. Members of our committee are:

- Jerry and Judy Niebaum (co-chairs)
- Phil and Diane Stiles
- Phil and Phoebe Godwin
- Ruth Ann Paddock
- Dan and Carol Abrahamson
- Judy Dailey
- Ken and Rowena Pine
- H. Sharon Howell

The first meeting of our committee was a dinner meeting at our home on September 11, 2001, my birthday. Minutes of our meeting record that "With heavy hearts and great sympathy for the victims of the terrorist tragedies against our country, our committee moved forward to consider the past and plan for the future."

My own connection with First Church started in 1957 when I began attending as a KU student affiliate. Rev. Al Bramble, who served in the first pastor era included in this latest history, was my pastor. When my wife, Judy, and I joined First Church as a married couple in the Fall of 1961, Al Bramble was our pastor. We remember him as a compassionate caring minister.

One of my personal inspirations in this writing was having on loan from First Church a copy of the History of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Lawrence, Kansas written by Mary Patterson Clarke and published in 1915. Not only was her writing inspiring, but the particular copy I borrowed had once belonged to Dr. Edwin F. Price, who was affiliated with First Church from 1920 to 1972 and served as Director of Wesley Fellowship on the KU campus. First Church has two stained glass windows at the rear of the sanctuary honoring the work of Dr. Price and his wife, Lena. Edwin and I had at least a couple of things in common. We were both born and raised in Sumner County in South Central Kansas, and we shared a birthday, September 11. Edwin and Lena lived in a small basement apartment in the Wesley Foundation building on campus. Their 'living room' was a public space where a television was located. On several occasions while we were dating, Judy and I would share an evening of television and popcorn with the Prices in their very public living space. We were also guests in their new west Lawrence home at their retirement celebration in 1959. It was a very special time for the two of us, and we remember them fondly. It was personally moving to me to use his personal copy of our Church history in preparing this update.

These writings describe events, personalities, timetables, and some statistics. The real history of our Church is about spirit, about inspiration, about faith in things unseen, and about fellowship. It is about lives changed by moments of insight into our relationship with our God. The spirit of our history can be found in the support given us in the deep grief for loss of a loved one; in the uplift realized in times of personal depression; in the smile or handshake of those who have shared a meaningful worship experience; in the joy of new lives united in marriage; and, in the thrill of new life baptized into the faith.

The history presented here is a glimpse of some of the events and participants. We hope that it captures some of the spirit of what we have been and what we are as people of God. This booklet is offered as a companion to the first publication of another part of our Church history from 1915 to 1954 written by Mary Patterson Clarke.

Following purchase of the magnificent property we now call West Campus, we confirmed, as we expected, that we had purchased a small piece of the Oregon Trail. From the high point of the property the Kansas River Valley spreads wide to the north while the majestic Wakarusa River Valley lays to the south. One can easily envision the wagon trains headed west across this beautiful section of prairie. One can also envision our first minister, Rev. James Griffing, atop his Indian pony, Jacob, pausing on this high spot to enjoy the beauty of this untamed land as he rode out on his Wakarusa Circuit.



## VISTA

PHYLLIS M. JONES

LAWRENCE PRESBYTERIAN MANOR

Long ago, the snow  
fell steadily, white upon white;  
our footsteps marked fresh paths  
and we dreamed of tomorrow, and tomorrow...

Children imprinted angel wings in the snow  
and dashed inside for hot chocolate  
before building their forts.  
Snow geese winging southward reminded us  
of a song grandmother sang,  
“Hush my little one, wild geese are passing by.”

Radios threaded the airways with  
“I’ll Be Home For Christmas;”  
across the land families prayed  
for young soldiers in the bitter  
snow-covered woods of the Ardennes.

Now we know footprints in the snow  
give clues to where we have been,  
not always to where we are going.  
We look out —  
the snow is white and beautiful;  
our window frames its whiteness  
and our dreams of tomorrow, and tomorrow...

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