

Churches in the Shenandoah Valley

St Paul's United Church of Christ
235 S.Main St
Woodstock, VA 22664



A brief History

St. Paul's German Reformed Church (now St. Paul's United Church of Christ) was founded on May 11, 1748, in Woodstock, Virginia, by the Rev. Michael Schlatter, a missionary and church organizer who was making a tour through the northern Shenandoah Valley from Pennsylvania. He stopped at many towns in his travels, including Winchester, Strasburg, and New Market. In Millerstadt (Woodstock) on the afternoon of the 11th, he preached "to a pretty large number of 'hearers' and baptized many children and adults."

Itinerant missionaries served the Woodstock congregation from 1748 until 1787, when the Rev. Bernhard F. Willey arrived as the first regular pastor. He had been sent to America

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from his native Switzerland in 1783 at the request of the Reformed Church in this country, because there were so few ministers to serve all the congregations. When he began in Woodstock, he also taught a German and English parochial school here. Although times were difficult in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, Rev. Willey helped the congregation build a solid foundation before he died here in May, 1810, while still in active ministry. He is buried in the old Reformed Cemetery on South Church Street between Spring and South Streets (“the graveyard on the hill”). The original log church (“the church on the hill”) was also on the site of the cemetery, near the southeast corner, and a marker to the Rev. Willey stands close by.

By the end of the War Between the States, the log church was about 100 years old and in very bad condition. There were stories of its being used as a stable for Union horses. It had been built shortly after the laying out of the town (around 1766) and was a square log building with galleries around on three sides. It was furnished with pews, “which were at all times suggestive of penance.” The congregation met on September 15, 1866, and decided it was time to build a new church, which came to be the present house of worship at the corner of Main and Spring Streets.

Because of the ravages of the War, the local congregation had no money to build a new church, so they appealed to the wider church for help. They prepared a “circular, setting forth our necessities and inability of ourselves to accomplish the end we have in view.” They also decided to purchase the lot on which “stood the house of Mr. J Hickman on the N.E. corner of the intersection of South Main Street and East Spring Street (“the street leading to the parsonage,” which was on the corner of Spring and Church Streets). Mr. W.H. Bargelt (the secretary of the Consistory) was appointed to make the purchase, which he did at the cost of \$350. cash. The pastor at the time, the Rev. G. H. Martin, made several trips to the churches to the north, mostly in Maryland and Pennsylvania, and was able to collect \$3,551.42 for the building fund.

Work on the new church began almost immediately, and one man was paid \$1.25 a day to supervise the construction. The sanctuary was to be 40 by 60 feet and 22 feet high, made of brick. “Mr. D.D. Hoshour, the lowest bidder, received the contract for making and laying the brick at \$10.50 per thousand. The clay for the bricks was obtained at the site of the church, and the bricks were made and burned on the lot next to the burying ground of the old church,” about a block away. The carpentry contract went to Samuel Coffman, who was to do the work and furnish all the wood materials used in the new building for \$1,475. The plastering was done by J. Grandstaff for \$395, and Joseph and David Fravel received the contract for painting at \$168. The cornerstone was laid on August 15, 1867, and the Ladies of the church purchased the bell, which was placed in the cupola. The new church was dedicated in October, 1868.

Although Rev. Martin was instrumental in getting the new church built, he must have made some enemies along the way, and after serving faithfully and well for 19 years, he resigned in 1884. He noted that “a few of the members in the Woodstock congregation do not feel kindly toward me,” and that he “had not for a long time received any money and was sorely in need of funds.” It was around this time that, due to realignment, the Woodstock

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Charge was made up only of Mt. Calvary and St. Paul's.

Following Rev. Martin's resignation, several calls were extended by the church but were refused, until the Rev. A.W. Kline accepted in 1885. During his pastorate, the new parsonage was acquired. The old parsonage on South Church Street had served at least ten church families and was in dire need of repair. At a meeting in January, 1888, the committee to work on this project decided that it would be better to dispose of the old property and build a new parsonage. The congregation unanimously agreed, and it was decided to purchase Lot Number 11 on Town Hill for \$272.50. The records regarding the building of the new parsonage are gone, but we know that Rev. Kline and his family were the first occupants at 551 South Main Street. In 1908, additions were made to the parsonage because the new minister, the Rev. J.S. Hartman, had such a large family. (His salary was \$700 a year and horse feed.)

In the spring of 1894 and taking a year to finish, much-needed repairs and renovations were made to the sanctuary, at a cost of \$3,349.33. (The repairs were to have been started in 1892, but Pastor Kline accepted a call in Pennsylvania, and the work was put on hold while the church searched for a new pastor.) While the work was in progress, some conflict arose within the church over whether the organ and choir should be placed in the balcony or rear of the church or whether the wishes of others and the Consistory should rule that they would be placed in the front of the sanctuary at the right of the pulpit. In the end, everyone was assured that it was a simple misunderstanding, and the organ and choir were placed in the front. New pews were installed during the remodeling and were the source of pride to many. Members were given the opportunity to select their pews, beginning with the oldest members. Pew No. 2 on the left was set aside for the minister's family. In 1938, the stained glass altar window was dedicated to the memory of the Rev. and Mrs. N.H. Skyles.

The most recent modifications to St. Paul's were the additions of a Sunday School wing and the Fellowship Hall (in the basement) around 1950 and the Parlor and widening of the narthex in 1961. Total handicapped accessibility for the church was accomplished in 2002, with the building of a new entrance, barrier free hallways, and two large accessible bathrooms.

In 1998, St. Paul's celebrated its 250th Anniversary !

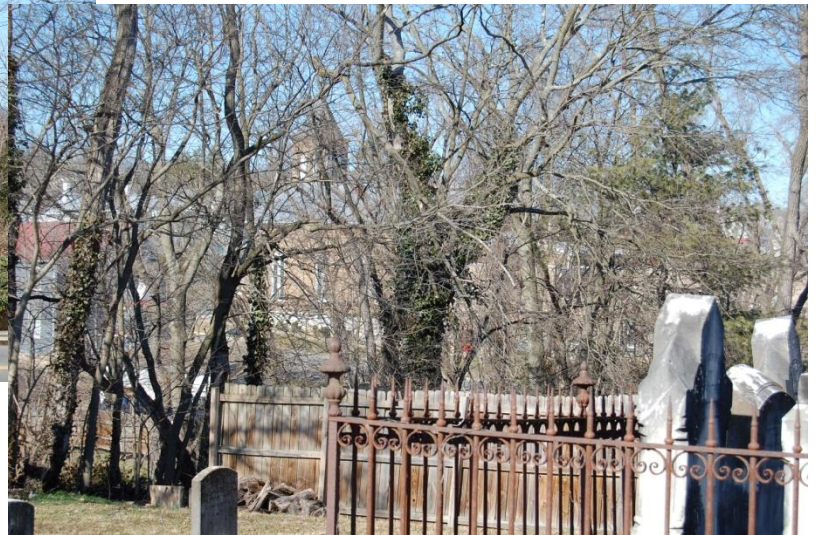
Written by Ellen Markel, February 2012

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Second Parsonage



Church at rear of cemetery

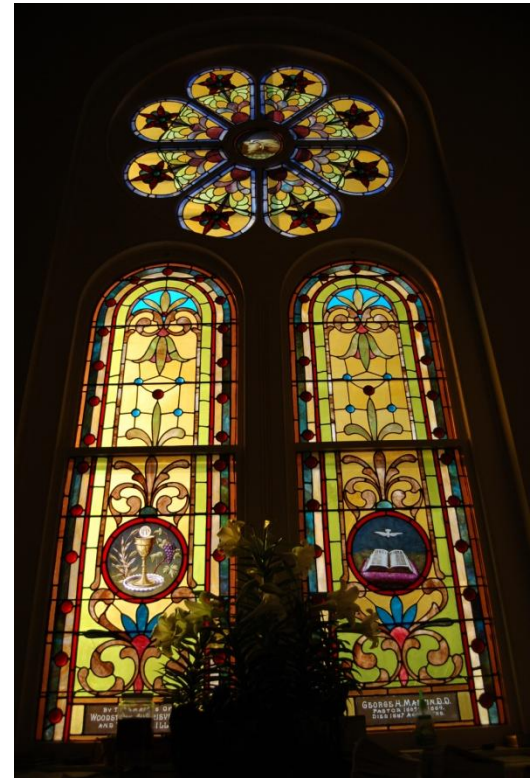
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Sanctuary, April 2012

Window in Narthex, Easter, 2012



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