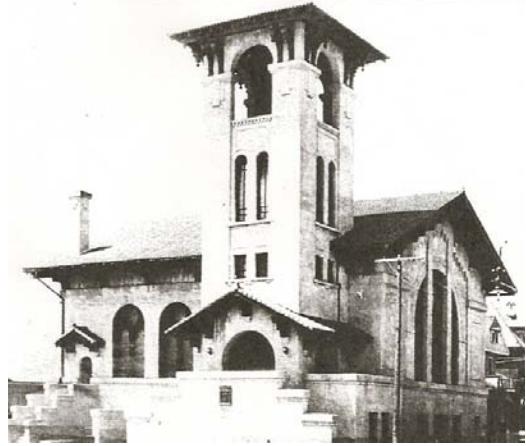


Some Highs and Lows of El Paso's Westminster / University Church

We are here today because of others – others who brought us to faith. And where did they get it, but from others, who in turn got it from others – all of them part and parcel of Holy Mother Church? It is therefore right to remember those who have gone before us. But for them, we should not be here today.
– Gordon Bowie

22 Jul 1903 – Westminster Presbyterian Church is organized (PCUS, * 14 charter members) in a tent on the corner of Oregon and Franklin. By November the tent is replaced by a building constructed on Rio Grande and Florence.



15 Oct 1911 – With a congregation 210 strong, a second building (above) is celebrated on the Rio Grande property. After a high of 369 [1919] and a low of 61 [1949], we are now 219 in community.

1921 – Now with 332 members, El Paso's US Presbyterians are split east & west by Cotton Street with the easterners requested to become members of the new Manhattan Church.

1934 – Reduced to 106 members by things like the great depression, a 7 Jan Congregational Meeting votes 30-15 to enable those who want to join First Church (PCUSA, organized in 1882) to do so. Reconsidered three weeks later (after the ones who wanted to leave had left), the Congregation voted 35-0 to "carry on by itself," requesting First Church to return items taken there by others, including a Communion Table (which remains missing – it has IHS and WPC carved on it – a \$10 reward for finding it).

8 Aug 1940 – Lightening strikes the building, destroying the pipe organ. The pipe organ isn't replaced with the insurance money – it's used to pay off the building debt. An electronic Hammond organ is substituted for the pipe organ. That year 11% of the contributions are given to benevolent causes. A cut-out space in the Resler worship area was designed for that 1940 Hammond, which has been replaced by a larger one.

1 Jan 1950 – During almost three years without a pastor, the Session approves of the 1949 interim Pastor. But not so the Presbytery – they consider him a dispensationalist, advising that his interim position be completed 31 Dec 1949. The Session responds that Presbytery "had been little help in securing a pastor and now warned them of the one they had found;" moreover, Presbytery is informed that he will be in the pulpit in 1950. Well, Presbytery padlocks the church doors on Sunday, New Year's Day. The pulpit is quiet for two weeks. The interim forms the El Paso Bible Presbyterian Church, Westminster losing a handful of members, leaving at year's end 72 – 11 more than 1949.

Apr 1952 – The 1950 not-so-happy New Year got the congregation's attention. Following Presbytery's advice, the Congregation votes to start afresh. The building is sold to the St. George Syrian Orthodox Church and a third building (right) is built on the corner of Gregory and Stanton. The name is also changed to University Church (the building is within range of Tex-



as Western College and has an active Westminster College Fellowship). The new building is officially dedicated in 1953 with common amnesia of the Church's 50th anniversary.

Summer 1963 – The Synod of Texas (US) recommendation of a statement of “evangelism without regard to race or color” is hotly debated by the Session, resulting the next month in a tie vote, broken by the Moderator. At UPC, civil rights just barely become recognized for “the most segregated hour in the nation.”

1967 – Only four years after the PCUS General Assembly approved the ordination of women Elders, UPC elects its first three female Elders. Soon afterward the Women of the Church, going back to the 1903 Ladies Aid Society, is disbanded.

1973 – Having grown to a congregation of 185, and after years of discussion, the Congregation votes to move again – to the middle of nowhere (Resler, then a gravel road). There is no need of a picture of this fourth building, you're in it. Its Reformed tradition emphasizes a worship space with an entrance Baptismal fount, a central Communion table and an empty Cross seen through a window – outside, where the work of the church may be found. The building obtains a merit award for excellence in design from the Guild for Religious Architecture.

Feb 1980 – The UPC *newsletter* states, “Yankee and Rebel Presbyteries Unite – The Civil War is Over.” The US and USA Presbyteries in far west Texas unite to form the Tres Rios Presbytery (the San Saba, Pecos and Rio Grande Rivers). By 1983 the two denominations unite after over 12 decades of separation.

17-24 Jul 1983 – Having missed the church's 25th, 50th and 75th anniversaries, the 80th is celebrated. This includes historical musical celebrations, a champaign reception (bubbly in the building?), and historical skits including the 1913 Sessional discussion of “worldly amusements as related to Sabbath School Teachers,” the 1915 nightly 15-minute cornet solo played from the church tower inviting all to revival (with numerous conversions), the padlocking of the church doors, and the imprisonment of the advent wise men and camels in the Stanton fellowship hall (ask someone who remembers about details on the walled-in wise men). Also included was the guest signature of the infamous interim 1949 Pastor (faked to effectively rattle the skit writer).

1990-91 – The Resler building is extended (almost doubled in area: a new pastor's office, conference room, fellowship hall, kitchen, choir room and youth room); most of the work done by members. Yes, it took about two years but the money saved went to benevolences. Enjoy the new kitchen, the old one is now a closet for storing tables.

2001 – A long range task force proposes a contemporary worship service. This is approved and new audio-visual equipment and instruments are purchased. The schedule ignores Adult Christian education; the start-time interferes with Sunday school and was later changed to 0900.

2003 – The “Old hundredth” birthday party lasts almost 11 months. With a “kick-off” historical church music program, followed by burning the mortgage and finished with a barbecue off NM 28 attended by guests who had moved away. In some ways we've come a long way from that tent – but in important ways, not so far. The Hebrew Bible views history as His story. “He” works through people. Our trail from there to here has depended on the perseverance and work of an untold number of saints. The list is long, mostly unheralded, none canonized, but we are here because of them.

* The Presbyterian Church suffered a massive political split due to the Civil War and its aftermath. The Northern Church is identified as PCUSA (or USA) and the Southern Church is identified as PCUS (or US).