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The Church: A Recent History

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The Church: A Recent History

Remember putting your baby hands together and learning to say, “Here is the Church and here is the steeple. Open the door and there’s all the people,” and you’d waggle your fingers and feel proud of your congregation. Central Presbyterian has reason to waggle its fingers. The Church has opened its doors in a new and ever-expanding mission of service. More specifically, it has opened the doors of the Freeman House for multipurpose church and community outreach use.

A new chapter in the Church’s long and dedicated history is being written. This chapter, like all the others, shows the hand of God at work in the lives, the structures, and the purposes of the Church. The decade of the 1990’s has marked a turning point preparatory for the 21st century and for further service to the Glory of God.

The decade began, sadly, with the death in Fairfield, Connecticut, of Marguerite Cartwright Hawthorne, March 17, 1990. Marguerite’s bequest to Central Presbyterian Church, “the church of my father and mother,” made possible the purchase of the Freeman House, the House Next Door, December 31, 1991. The house brought additional options and opportunities. There was talk, of course, of moving the house, making space for parking and an additional building. The national, and unfortunately, Huntsville, trend is for urban churches to purchase neighboring dwellings and remove or destroy them for their parking potential.

Carol Ann had other ideas: to restore the Freeman House “to its original beauty, maintaining its historical integrity.” Since her days as an elder, she had sounded the call for the Session to set aside funds annually for capital development. Then, before Carol Ann left the board, Rhonda Mitchell had put together the proposal to establish the Hawthorne Conservatory in the Freeman House. Carol Ann’s eyes intensified to their truest blue as she recalled the exhilaration she felt at Rhonda Mitchell’s proposal.

“This was God’s answer,” she exclaimed. The Church had for some time been looking for a new focus. Like most urban churches its membership had thinned with the hairs on many a head. Rhonda Mitchell’s proposal would bring new direction and dynamism to the Church. Carol Ann took up the call, became an advocate and spokesman, working to get it approved before she left the board.

Momentum gathered after that. In January 1996, the Session and the congregation approved the Conservatory as “a Christian Ministry of Central Presbyterian Church.” It also approved the renovation of the Freeman House. “Carol Ann Samples was named to Chair the Freeman House Task Force and appoint a committee to assist her.”

Ask the workmen or Nathan Dean. They will tell you. Carol Ann spared no personal effort to get the job done and done right. Harvie Jones was contracted to design and assist the committee (see his report). In her Annual Report, Carol Ann wrote:

“April, 1996 construction contract was awarded to R.F. Vandiver. Construction began in late April 1996, and project completed in Mid October, 1996.

Many members donated time and resources to the restoration with love, perserverance and their prayers. I have witnessed God’s Spirit in action among the members.

We also received community-wide support for the Conservatory and the Restoration Project. **The Huntsville Historic Foundation, Doris Burwell Foundation**, and others in the community have supported the Project.

The Dedication of the Freeman House to be used for the Glory of God was made by Dr. Dave Reynolds [Pastor] and the congregation on October 13, 1996. It was a beautiful day and exciting to the members as they had their first tour of the House. The response was uplifting. The FREEMAN HOUSE was restored to its original beauty maintaining its his-



*Carol Ann Samples and
Nathan Dean.*

torical integrity. The home now meets all safety, fire and handicap codes. Policies and Guidelines were established and approved by the Session. A Freeman House Board was established to oversee the operation and needs of the House and the Hawthorne Conservatory. The Board reports to the Session.

The congregation, the staff, and the committee with the guidance of the Holy Spirit have made 1996 an exciting year for the Central Presbyterian Church. We look forward to using our blessings to the Glory of God.”

In a later report Carol Ann expressed appreciation for individual church members’ roles in restoration: “The success of the restoration of the Freeman House involved the dedication and service of many members of the church using their talents. It was my pleasure to have the opportunity to work and share the experience of bringing the house back to life with them.

- The Pastor and the staff gave tremendous support. Eloise Stokes, the secretary, supported me in so many ways that I cannot list them, always willingly and happily. We could not have made it without her.
- The volunteers spent well over 500 hours and saved the cost of restoration thousands of dollars.
- Jeff Smith, Committee member, was our moral and spiritual support, always there for whenever we needed him. His wisdom and guidance was fundamental to our success.
- Tom McDonald, historical researcher of the Courthouse and Freeman House, was our official photographer.
- Teresa MacMillan, Architect, designed the kitchen layout after many meetings with the Fellowship Committee. She also did the final punch list.
- Joan Warren, experienced restorationist, removed all the hardware and light fixtures and supervised the cleaning. This involved removing dirt, grime, paint and then buffing and rubbing. Underneath it all was beautiful copper and brass hardware. Virginia Tuck, Nell Boykin, Donald Dowdy (our choir director) and Wynell Reynolds accomplished this task. The Men’s Bible class served us lunch every Wednesday during our work session.
- Ed Gartrell supervised roof repairs and assisted in many major decisions.
- Volunteers cleaned the lot after construction and Michael Samples, with assistance, landscaped the lawn.
- The Mariners of the Church cleaned the house and yard in preparation for the Open House.
- Cathy King and Tom MacDonald, artists, presented the church drawings of the Freeman House and served on the planning committee.
- Donald Dowdy, Music Director, was always on call and assisted in numerous ways.
- Volunteers made this a success and are vital to the continued success of the Hawthorne Conservatory and ministry of Central Presbyterian Church.