

Downtown by History and Choice

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**First Presbyterian Church
of Durham, North Carolina
1871–2013**

Peter Graham Fish



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*In Honor and in Memory
of the Faithful
Ministers, Officers, and Congregation
Past and Present Through the Circling Years*

Contents

List of Tables, Graphs, and Maps	xiii
List of Illustrations	xv
Preface	xxi
1 • Founding Decade	
Southern Presbyterians	3
New Year’s Eve, 1871	4
Circuit-Riding Ministers	7
First House of Worship	12
Fitzgerald Preaches	18
2 • Rev. Darnall, Messrs. Morehead and Watts	
Organizing and Building	21
Watts and Morehead	25
Saints and Sinners	31
Outreach to Others	33
3 • Turnbull Years	
Morality and Militancy	37
Safeguarding the Flock	39
Foreign Missions	42
Industrial Missions	44
Presbyterian Colonization	46
Pearl Mill Chapel	46
Edgemont Chapel	48
West Durham Chapel	48
Staffing the Chapels	52
Twentieth-Fifth Anniversary (1871–1896)	53
4 • Leyburn’s Pastorate	
New Pastor, New Century	55
Calvin’s Presence	57
Worship and Secular Intrusions	59
Spirituality Besieged	62
World War I	64
Sunday School Building	67
Third House of Worship	72
“American Gospel” to the World	77
Home Missions	81
Church Women	82
Mill Chapels	84

Edgemont Chapel	84
Pearl Mill Chapel — Second Presbyterian Church	86
West Durham Chapel — Blacknall Memorial Church	88
End and Beginning	90
5 • The Scanlon Era	
A Dynamic Minister Called	93
William Powell Twaddell	94
Scanlon's Assistants	98
Another Watts Legacy	100
Growth and Democratization	103
Woman's Auxiliary	107
Financial Oasis: 1920s	113
Post-Leyburn Worship	114
Entrepreneurial Pastor	119
Fundamentalism at Bay	121
"Demon Rum"	123
Race Relations	126
Presbyterian Reunion Impaled	131
The Crash of 1929	133
Former Mill Chapels	136
Squeezing Missions	139
Pastor Emeritus	142
6 • The Marion Interlude	
Unanimous Choice	145
Teaching Elder (Minister)	148
Crises Messages	149
Worship and Mission Challenges	151
Changing Staff	152
Departure	154
7 • Regen and His Flock	
Installation of a Shepherd	157
In Stormy Times	159
Membership, Money, and Regen in Action	160
Regen's Staff	162
Empire of Music	165
Women's Presence	173
Blacknall Bible Class	178
Big Brothers' Bible Class	180
Cloister Chapel and Porch Railings	181
Renovation and Expansion Plans	184
Air Conditioning and Heating!	187
Furnishings: Liturgical and Otherwise	188
Whither Christian Education and the Kitchen?	190
Priorities: Sunday School or Parking?	192
The Lawn, Real Estate, and Finances	194
Wartime Pulpit Messages	196

Worship in Times of War and Peace	199
Worship Experiences through the Year	204
Democracy and Equality	209
Presbyterian Reunion Untracked	211
Wartime Challenges and Missions	213
An Elusive Peace	218
Foreign and Domestic Missions	223
Outreach: Kerr Lake and Westminster Fellowship	225
Church and State	227
Racial Cooperation and Limits	230
Farewell	233
8 • Watershed Decision	
The van Straaten Committee	237
Impetus for Change	238
Move Now!	242
From Committee to Boards	245
Congregational Meeting	247
Reflection and Reaction	249
New Dawn	251
9 • Transition Ministries: Currie and Boggs	
A Pulpit Vacancy Filled — At Last	255
Tradition and Change	260
Women of the Church	261
Worship: Form and Substance	266
Music: “Mr. B” and Assistants	268
Propounding the Word	272
Currie Challenged	278
Old and New	278
Christian Education Building	279
Call to Witness	285
Race Crisis	288
Gender Equality	292
Exit Currie, Enter Boggs	294
10 • New Directions: Wallace Alston	
Alston and Associates	297
Tides in Staffing	304
Farewell to Mrs. Matthis	305
Worship Directions	308
Worship Services and Attendance	312
Centennial Celebration	313
Loss and Eternal Life	317
On Church, Society, and War	319
Probing a Political and Economic Wilderness	322
Worship and Broadcast Media	325
Plant and Property	326
A New Order at Hand	329

Presbyterian Reunion	329
Presbytery Merger	330
Empowering Church Officers	330
Officer Training	333
Mission Redirection	333
Women of the Church	336
Day Care Center	337
Church Bus?	338
Reaching Out in Durham	340
Center City Church Council	340
Creative Arts in the Schools	340
Alston and Raynal Leave	342
 11 • Hope's Ministry	
Called and Installed	345
Rev. David C. Hester	347
Music Leadership Changes	349
Staffing the Church and Higher Courts	350
Challenges, Hospitality, Improvements	351
Worship Transformed	356
Word of God	360
Bicentennial: 1776–1976	362
Church and the Arts	363
Congregational Care	364
Day Care Center	367
Urban Missions	368
World Missions	372
Ministerial Farewells: Danhof/Watkins Report	374
Calling Sam Wiley	376
 12 • Joseph Harvard: From One Century to Another	
Harvard Called	379
Expounding the Word	385
Associate Ministers	389
Rev. Carter Shelley (Smith)	389
Rev. Arabella Meadows-Rogers	392
Rev. Mary Holmes Milbourne (Banner)	394
Rev. Lori Ellen Pistor	397
Ministerial Assistants	401
Music Ministers	406
The Congregation	411
Church Governance	413
Presbyterian Reunion Reality	416
Confronting Sexuality	419
Building, Preserving, Enriching	423
Windows	424
A Capital Campaign	425
Stitchers at Work	426
Baptismal Font, Gifts and a Prohibition	427

Worshipping Community	429
Music	430
Worship Events	432
Mid-Week Services	437
“Service for Wholeness”	439
Psalm Service	440
Service of Marriage	440
Greeters and Bulletins	441
Changes in Liturgy	442
Baptism	442
Lord’s Supper	442
The Peace	444
Amen	444
Gender-Neutral Language	445
Caring Community	446
Women in Transition	448
Witness in Durham	450
Joe Harvard: Civic Leader	451
Downtown by Choice	452
Day School	453
Urban Ministry	454
Housing	456
Urban Mission in Worship	458
Foreign Missions	459
Celebrating the 125th	460
 13 • Into a New Millennium	
The Futures Report	465
Celebrating the Founding	468
Rev. Joseph S. Harvard	469
Rev. Lori Ellen Pistor	473
Rev. Marilyn Turner Hedgpeth	475
Rev. Samuel Russell Miglarese	478
Interns and Associates	480
Ray Mims and Caroline Kelly	480
Rev. Phyllis Kort	480
Kort’s Successors	482
Youth Ministers Transition	483
Membership, Finances, and Governance	485
Ordination Standards, Marriage, and Hospitality	490
“Remember, Renew, Rejoice”	494
Needs Assessment	494
Funding	495
Construction, Exile, Return	498
Bright, Beautiful, and Functional	504
Caveats	507
Worship, Music, and Education	507
9/11’s Impact	507
Attendance	508

Communion	508
Baptism	509
Order of Announcements	510
Art in Worship	510
“Unweavings”	510
Music	511
Policies and Guides	514
Lectures	516
Christian Education	516
Church in Mission	520
Presbyterian Women	520
“Prayer Shawl Group”	521
“First Quilts”	521
Outreach to Others	522
Outreach to Kenyans	522
Outreach to Hispanics	523
Habitat for Humanity	526
Disaster Relief	526
The Homeless	528
First Presbyterian Day School	530
Farewell to Joe Harvard	531
 Bibliography	 539
 Index to Persons	 551
 Index to Subjects	 581

List of Tables, Graphs, and Maps

Tables

1. Durham Congregation (Communicants): 1872–1880	6
2. First Church Real Estate Acquisitions and Sales: 1874–1983	13
3. Durham Congregation (Communicants): 1881–1893	23
4. Durham Congregation (Communicants): 1894–1902	40
5. Assistant/Associate/Chapel Pastors for Mill Missions: 1896–1921	47
6. Sunday School Enrollments: 1896	53
7. First Presbyterian Church of Durham (Communicants): 1903–1920	58
8. Honor Roll of Members Who Served in the Armed Forces During World War I: 1917–1919	65
9. First Presbyterian Church of Durham (Communicants): 1921–1937	105
10. First Officers Elected in 1933 Under the Rotary Plan of Fixed Terms	107
11. Women's Organizations (Presidents): Ladies Aid Society-Woman's Auxiliary-Women of the Church-Presbyterian Women: 1904–2013	108
12. Woman's Auxiliary Birthday Gifts: 1922–1939	111
13. Foreign Mission Benevolences: 1924–1939	141
14. First Presbyterian Church of Durham (Communicants): 1938–1959	146
15. Woman's Auxiliary-Women of the Church, Birthday Gifts: 1940–1962	174
16. Woman's Auxiliary-Women of the Church-Presbyterian Women, Honorary Life Memberships: 1949–2013	179
17. Sunday School Enrollments: 1941–1971	189
18. Honor Roll of Members Who Served in the Armed Forces During World War II: 1941–1945	218
19. Honor Roll of Members of Church Families Who Served in the Armed Forces During World War II: 1941–1945	220
20. Members of the Long-Range Study and Planning Committee: August 19, 1960	239
21. Congregational Survey of Preferences on Long-Range Plans: 1961	250
22. First Presbyterian Church of Durham (Communicants): 1960–1968	256
23. Women of the Church, Birthday Gifts: 1963–1987	264
24. Specifications of the Austin Organ (Opus 581): 1965	268
25. Named Contributors: Christian Education Building	283
26. Per Capita Giving: 1966	286
27. Durham Presbyterian Churches' Benevolences for Worldwide Christian Witness and Ministry: 1960–1965	286
28. First Presbyterian Church of Durham (Communicants): 1969–1973	298
29. Lecture Series Speakers: 1981–1999	315
30. First Presbyterian Church of Durham (Communicants): 1974–1979	346
31. First Presbyterian Church of Durham (Members): 1979–1999	412
32. Church Officers by Gender: 1980–1999	414

33. Mean Monthly Worship Attendance: 1979–1999	431
34. Advent Celebrations at First Church: 1980–1997	434
35. Urban Ministry Clients—Expenditures: 1981–1983	455
36. Active Church Membership: 2000–2012	486
37. Women Active Members/Total Active Members: 2000–2012	486
38. Race/Ethnicity of Active Members: 2000–2012	487
39. Active Members by Age Cohorts: 2000–2012	487
40. Gender Composition of Session and Diaconate: 2000–2012	489
41. Mean Annual Sunday Attendance: 2000–2012	501
42. McPherson Lectureship: 2000–2012	517
43. Sunday School Enrollments (including teachers): 1999–2000	517

Graphs

1. Church Membership, Budgets, Benevolences, and Foreign Missions: 1919–1949	135
2. First Church Membership and Attendance: 1940–1979	160
3. Total Church Expenditures: 2004–2013	488

Maps

1. First House of Worship, Minister's Residence and Environs: 1881	17
2. Second House of Worship, Manse and Environs: 1891	25
3. The Church, Manse and Its Urban Residential Setting: 1898	41
4. Pearl Mill [Mission] Chapel (est.1895)	49
5. West Durham Mill [Mission] Chapel (est. 1898)	51
6. The Church at Durham's Center: 1890–1937	57
7. Second House of Worship, Manse, Sunday School, and Environs: 1913	69
8. Soonchun Mission, Korea: 1917	79
9. Edgemont Chapel [Mill Mission] [Presbyterian Church], est. 1892	85
10. Second Presbyterian [Pearl Mill Mission] Church: 1913	89
11. Church Premises and Surrounding Neighborhood: 1937	114
12. Pine Street [Twine Memorial] Presbyterian Church: 1907	130
13. Granville Presbytery: 1946	132
14. Proposed Sunday School Addition to Fellowship Hall, circa 1950	191
15. Camp Butner: Person, Granville, Durham Counties: 1945	215
16. Presbyterian Point on Kerr Lake: 1958	227
17. Demography of (a) Church Membership; (b) Church Youth: June 30, 1959; (c) Racial Distribution in Durham: 1950	243
18. Church Premises and Christian Education Building—First Floor: 1964	280
19. Redevelopment Commission Map of Real Property Exchanges on (a) Liberty Street and (b) North Roxboro Street: 1971	326
20. Orange Presbytery: 1972	331
21. New Hope Presbytery: 1989	418
22. Memorial Garden as Designed by C. Balford Hackney in 1984: 1995	424
23. Church Renovations in 2003–2004 including the Chancel, Choir, Cloister Chapel, and an Elevator	505
24. Directions to Presbyterian Point and Camp Layout: 1980s	518

List of Illustrations

1. Session Minutes: 1871–1893 (a) Cover; (b) December 31, 1871	5
2. Rev. Drury Lacy: 1872–1874	8
3. Rev. Lacy’s Address: 1863	10
4. R. H. J. Blount, Senior Deacon and Builder: 1871	15
5. Receipt for Shipment of Shingles: 1875	16
6. First House of Worship: 1876	18
7. William H. Hanks, Elder and First Sunday School Superintendent: 1871–1885	19
8. Rev. Henry T. Darnall: 1880–1893	22
9. Second House of Worship: 1890	24
10. Ruling Elders and Benefactors: (a) Eugene Lindsay Morehead: 1880–1889; (b) George Washington Watts: 1889–1921	26
11. Second House of Worship: 1890 and Manse: 1882	30
12. Rev. Lennox B. Turnbull: 1894–1901	38
13. Rev. and Mrs. Charles R. Morton, Casa Branca Mission, Brazil	43
14. Casa Branca Mission, Araguari, Brazil: 1895	44
15. Durham’s Mills: circa 1900	45
16. West Durham [Mill Mission] Chapel: 1898	50
17. (a) Church on Main Street Looking West; (b) Church on Main Street Looking East	56
18. (a) Rev. Edward R. Leyburn: 1902–1919; (b) Walter H. Overton: 1905–?	60
19. Durham’s Union Railroad Station	61
20. Sunday School Building [Round House] erected 1913	68
21. View Southeast on Roxboro Street: Round House and Second House of Worship	70
22. “Cradle Roll” Postcard: 1915	71
23. Christmas Greetings from: (a) George W. Watts and (b) Rev. Leyburn	71
24. Third House of Worship: 1916; and Sunday School Building: 1913	75
25. Church Organ Assembled, Austin Organ Company, Hartford, Conn.: 1915	76
26. Soonchun Mission School, Korea: 1913	80
27. Second Presbyterian [Pearl Mill Mission] Church: 1916	86
28. First Congregational Newsletter, Local and Foreign Missions: 1905	87
29. Rev. David H. Scanlon: 1920–1938; (a) in 1919, (b) in 1929–1930	94
30. William Powell Twaddell, Music Director: 1921–1946	95
31. Balcony Choir in the 1920s	96
32. Children’s Choir School Choristers and New Church House: circa 1925	97
33. Scanlon Era Church Staff: 1935	99
34. Church Matron Emma Jones: 1923–1936	101
35. Architect’s rendering of the Church House [“Presbyterian Hut”] plan with Prophet’s Chamber: 1922–1923	103
36. Boy Scout Cabin: circa 1930	104

37. Rev. Scanlon at the Central Pulpit: 1920s	106
38. Sarah “Sadie” Fuller Blount Blacknall: 1862–1933	112
39. The Church and Sunday School: 1925	117
40. Educational Outreach: Edgar J. Banks, Lecturer: 1921	118
41. Rev. Scanlon and Director of Religious Education Aline McKenzie, Tour Directors: 1930	120
42. Malbourne Hotel: circa 1930s	124
43. Pine Street [Twine Memorial] Presbyterian Church: circa 1930s	129
44. Edgemont Presbyterian Church (Fuller Memorial Church), (a) circa 1920s; (b) Elder Thomas B. Fuller	138
45. Bragtown Chapel: 1929–1931	139
46. George Watts School, Soonchun Mission, Korea: 1920–1922	142
47. Rev. John Hardin Marion, Jr.: 1938–1940	147
48. Church and Church House: circa 1930–1940s	148
49. Children’s Choir and Processional Cross: 1939–1940	151
50. Clara Pugh Matthis, Church Hostess: 1940–1969	153
51. Rev. Edwin Kelsey Regen: 1941–1960	158
52. Halloween Party and Dance in the Fellowship Hall: October 23, 1953	164
53. Ross B. Kirven, Director of Religious Education: 1959–1961	165
54. Lillian Seay Hall, Organist and Choir Director: 1947–1952	167
55. Allan Hadley Bone, Organist and Choir Director: 1952–1955	168
56. Youth Choir Directed by Dorothy Newsom Rankin: April 30, 1952	169
57. Rev. Regen Throwing Horseshoes: 1954	170
58. Earl Franklin (“Mr. B.”) Bentel, Choirmaster: 1955–1972	171
59. “Mr. B.” Teaching Church Music: circa 1960	171
60. Carol Choir on Stage in Fellowship Hall: Christmas 1956	172
61. First Church Staff at the Regen Home: 1958	173
62. Woman’s Auxiliary, Circle 4 at the C. Spears Hicks Home, 1944	175
63. Blacknall Bible Class: late 1940s	180
64. Big Brothers’ Bible Class on Church Lawn: late 1940s	181
65. Cloister Chapel, Architect’s Rendering: 1942	182
66. Cloister Chapel: 1944	183
67. Cloister Chapel Exterior Door at 104 North Roxboro Street: 2000	183
68. Rev. Regen at the Central Pulpit Prior to Sanctuary renovations: mid-1950s	185
69. Lavishly Decorated Sanctuary for the Wright-Hawkins Wedding: 1950	186
70. Relocated Pulpit, Baptismal Fount and Added Lectern: mid-1950s	187
71. Fellowship Sunday School Class, also Known as the “Cabin Class”: circa 1948–1950	188
72. Lanier Pratt (Teacher) during Dedication of Renovated Basement Sunday School: 1950	190
73. Women of the Church Bazaar in West Parlor of the Church House: December 3, 1954	192
74. Venerable Afton Inn (a) Demolished in 1954; (b) Originally Donated by John Sprunt Hill	139
75. Easter Pageant: 1956	206
76. “PX Exchange” in Production by the “Fathers” of Servicemen: June 15, 1945	221
77. The Round House in its Last Years	238

78. Crowded Postwar Sunday School Classroom conditions in the Round House	240
79. Weekday Kindergarten on the Second floor of the Church House	241
80. Demolition of the Round House: 1963	251
81. New Christian Education Building (a) Rises; (b) Nears Completion: 1964	252
82. Assistant (Interim) Minister Thor Hall: 1960–1962	257
83. Rev. Thor Hall and Gordon C. MacPherson (D. C. E.) with Confirmation Class: April 1, 1962	258
84. Installation of Rev. David Mitchell Currie: 1963	260
85. Silver Anniversary of Clara Pugh Matthis as Church Hostess in (a) Fellowship Hall and in (b) West Parlor: September 28, 1965	262
86. Planning by the WOC for the Annual Meeting of the Granville Presbyterial: April 2–3, 1968	263
87. Archetypical Church Family on Sunday Bulletin Cover: September 11, 1966	266
88. Mr. Bentel Presenting the New Organ Console: 1965	270
89. Bell Choir on Front Porch Steps: December 1963	271
90. Rev. David M. Currie at the Pulpit: 1962–1969	272
91. Rev. Currie Greeting Worshipers on the Church's Front Porch Steps	277
92. Ground Breaking for the Christian Education Building: September 8, 1963	280
93. Christian Education in (a) Vacation Church School: 1961, and (b) in Sanctuary Basement: 1964	281
94. Crape Myrtle Bush Plantings Adorn the New Christian Education Building	282
95. Recognition of Veteran Sunday School Teachers: 1968	282
96. Consecration Service for the New Christian Education Building: October 25, 1964	284
97. Ordination and Installation of First Women Officer: Margaret (Mrs. Walter C.) Newton (Poole): January 9, 1966	293
98. Rev. Wallace McPherson Alston, Jr.: 1969–1974	298
99. Installation of Rev. Wallace M. Alston, Jr., October 5, 1969	300
100. View of Christian Education Building Looking East on Parrish Street: early 1970s	301
101. Installation of Rev. John Bush Rogers, Associate Minister: 1970–1971	302
102. Rev. Charles E. Raynal, III, Associate Minister: 1972–1974	303
103. Installation of Rev. Charles Raynal: September 24, 1972	303
104. Music Director E. Franklin Bentel: 1955–1972	305
105. Portrait of Church Hostess Clara P. Matthis Presented in 1971	306
106. Mrs. Marie Penny (Mrs. Jackson C.) Trueitt, Assistant to Church Hostess: 1940–1969; Church Hostess: 1969–1985	307
107. Centennial Celebration Invitation: October 31, 1971	313
108. Dr. Paul Louis Lehmann, Centennial Lecturer	314
109. “Centennial Sunday” Reception: October 31, 1971	314
110. Viewing of the Scanlon Portrait on “Centennial Sunday”: October 31, 1971	316
111. Confirmation Class: March 30, 1972	328
112. Girl Scout Troop Organized by Alice (Ms. Wallace M.) Alston	339
113. Rev. Samuel Rainey Hope, Minister: 1974–1979	346

114. Installation of Rev. Samuel R. Hope: November 3, 1974	347
115. Installation of Rev. David C. Hester: May 8, 1977	348
116. Rev. David Hester at the Pulpit, Assistant Minister: 1975–1976, Associate Minister: 1977–1979	349
117. William Graham, Organist and Choirmaster: 1972–1975	350
118. Architect's Rendering of the Narthex Renovation: 1976	355
119. Rev. David Hester and Edward Bruce Jackson (with Trumpet), Rally Day Procession: September, 1975	365
120. Confirmation Class with Rev. Hope and Rev. Hester: June 3, 1979	366
121. Rev. Thomas Davis and Spouse Alice: October 1977	369
122. Rev. Samuel Hope and Spouse Nancy: November 1978	372
123. Rev. Samuel Shannon Wiley, Interim Minister: 1979–1980	376
124. Rev. Joseph Sherwood Harvard III, Minister: 1980–2013	382
125. Installation Reception for Rev. Joseph Harvard: November 9, 1980	384
126. Twentieth Anniversary of the Ministry of Rev. Harvard: July 13, 1986	385
127. Meeting of the Pulpit Nomination Committee on Call of First Woman Associate Pastor: Spring 1981	389
128. Installation of Rev. Carter Shelley (Smith): September 27, 1981	391
129. Farewell to Rev. Shelley (Smith): 1984	392
130. Rev. Arabella Meadows-Rogers, Associate Minister: 1985–1992	393
131. Rev. Meadows-Rogers on Front Porch of the Church: July 5, 1992	395
132. Rev. Mary Holmes Milbourne (Banner), Interim Associate Minister: 1992–1993	396
133. Farewell to Mary Holmes Milbourne (Banner), Urban Minister: 1983–1986, 1994–2001	397
134. Rev. Lori Ellen Pistor, Associate Minister: 1993–2003	398
135. Confirmation Class: May 26, 1985	402
136. Fourth Grade Sunday Schoolers at Work on Mosaic Tile Cross: March, 1992	403
137. Sexton Robert Daye: 1983	404
138. Sexton Daye in the Church House Kitchen	405
139. Robert Daye and Rev. Harvard on the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Sexton's Service: 1998	405
140. Senior Choir Party with Music Minister Kathy Cain Parkins: June 16, 1982	406
141. Anne Parks, Minister of Music: 1982–1984	407
142. Frederick Hohman, Minister of Music: 1984–1988	407
143. Minister of Music Hohman and the Choir following Final Concert: 1988	408
144. Jeffery D. Snedeker, Minister of Music: 1989–1991	409
145. Thomas Warburton, Minister of Music: 1991–1998	410
146. Kathy Cain Parkins, Minister of Music: 1978–1982, 1998–	410
147. Suzanne Smith, Youth Music Director: 1990–1997	411
148. Future Sunday Schoolers: December 1999	413
149. Recognition by Rev. Harvard of Jane (Mrs. M. Henderson) Rourk, Orange Presbytery Moderator: 1982–1983	416
150. Sunday Bulletin Covers with Seals of the Reunited Presbyterian Church [PC(USA)]: (a) 1984; (b) 1985	417

151. First Church Commissioners to the Presbytery of New Hope Meeting: November 1991	419
152. Rev. Harvard's defense of Durham Mayor Wib Gulley's Anti-Discrimination Proclamation: 1986	420
153. Processional Lenten Banner Dedicated in 1992 (a); Pew Bonnets (b)	427
154. Rev. Harvard Greeting Worshipers: 1990s	430
155. Chancel Decorated on the Third Sunday of Advent with Advent Wreath: 1997	436
156. Interdenominational Palm Sunday Worship (a) at the Durham County Court House: 1990s, (b) Return Processional: 1992	438
157. High Cross Lenten-Easter Project on Church Lawn at Roxboro and Main streets: April 16, 1995	439
158. Table Setting of Easter Sunday Communion: April 6, 1980	443
159. Chrismon Tree Decorating in Church Foyer: December 5, 1999	447
160. Professor Waldo Beach at Advent-Christmas Fellowship Supper: 1991	447
161. Reception by the Adult Bible Class for Annie Strayhorn: May 2, 1981	449
162. Church Photographer par excellence Walter E. Shackelford on the Prowl: April 22, 1996	454
163. Habitat for Humanity Home in the Edgemont Community: 1991	457
164. Rev. Harvard Celebrating his Twentieth Anniversary at First Church: October, 2000	470
165. Rev. Pistor at the Interfaith Service in Remembrance of "9/11": 2002	472
166. Choir Farewell to Pastor Pistor: March 9, 2003	474
167. Rev. Marilyn Turner Hedgpeth, Parish Associate: 2003–2004; Temporary Supply Minister: 2004; Associate Minister: 2004–	475
168. Rev. Samuel Russell Miglarese, Associate Minister for Christian Formation: 2006–	478
169. Rev. Phyllis Kort, Parish Associate: 2001–2010	481
170. First Church Seniors on Excursion to Warrenton Presbyterian Church: March 4, 2003	482
171. First Church Staff: circa 2008	484
172. Renovations in 2003–2004: (a) Chancel Demolition; (b) Sanctuary Construction	499
173. Cloister Chapel Renovations in (a) 2004 and in (b) 2005	500
174. Removal of Oak Trees on Church Lawn: April 29, 2004	501
175. Congregational Processional Return to the Renovated Church: November 14, 2004	502
176. Advent Views of the Chancel before (1980) and after Renovations (2004)	503
177. Celebrating Easter Sunday in the Renovated Chancel: 2005	504
178. Renovations included Elevator Access to Four Floors	506
179. David Smith Cantoring the Refrain of Psalm 84 with Rev. Miglarese seated	511
180. The Hand Bell Choir: October 22, 2000	512
181. Choir Party at the Dewey and Elizabeth Lawson Home: August 31, 2005	513
182. Youth Mission to Mexico: 2002	520
183. Rev. Julio Cesar Ramirez-Eve, Pastor of Iglesia Emanuel: 2005–	525

184. Interfaith Pilgrimage to Israel (a) West Wall of the Temple Mount: (b) Bishop Elroy Lewis and Rev. Harvard Insert Prayers in Wall Crevices: Summer 2000	527
185. First Presbyterian Church Day School	530
186. Rev. Harvard's Penultimate Service at First Church included (a) Multiple Baptisms with Rev. Hedgpeth and (b) Music by First Church Wind Ensemble: April 28, 2013	534
187. Revs. Harvard and Hedgpeth Consecrate the Communion Elements at Rev. Harvard's Final Worship Service: May 5, 2013	536
188. Rev. Harvard and Spouse Carlisle Bid Farewell to the Congregation: May 5, 2013	537
189. House of Worship in the Twenty-first Century: (a) sanctuary; (b) exterior	538

Preface

For more than 140 years and with the sesquicentennial on the horizon, the First Presbyterian Church, organized as the Durham Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, has stood as a beacon of the Christian faith in the center of this Piedmont city in North Carolina. Generations of Durham Presbyterians have entered the church's open doors to share in worship, study, fellowship, and service. They have come in good times and bad, in peace and in war, and in times of domestic tranquility, and in times of social crises. By their presence and actions in a community of faith, they have, year in and year out, borne witness to God's love and justice in the world. From humble beginnings in 1871, members of the Church spread the gospel at home and abroad. The legacy of this evangelism lives on today in the continued development of Presbyterianism in Durham and in foreign lands.

Situated since its earliest days at the busy corner of Roxboro and Main streets, the downtown church and its life have been marked by fidelity to biblical teachings, to liturgical standards, to the Christian education of youth and adults, and to the needs of the larger surrounding community. Those qualities continue to characterize First Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century as witnessed by the launching of an ambitious campaign to renovate its historic physical plant under a banner bearing the words: "Remember, Renew, Rejoice." These stirring words have rung true in every generation of First Churchers from the celebration in a newly-built house of worship on the church's twenty-fifth anniversary in 1896 to the present. This book is the story of remembrances, renewals and rejoicing of God's faithful people in downtown Durham and their relationship with God and with the beloved community. It is the story of God's grace working through the lives of His people gathered together at Roxboro and Main streets in a mission of Christian witness.

I am grateful for the help of others: Rev. Joseph S. Harvard III, who sowed the seed of a substantial church history; Rev. Lori Pistor and Marilyn Hedgpeth who both supported this project with enthusiasm; Walter Shackleford, who chaired the 125th Anniversary Committee and who, as the First Church's unofficial photographer par excellence for some fifty years, made available his massive collection of magnificent photographs of the life of the congregation; John Fricks, his successor, who has continued to provide a photographic record of the ever-changing Church and its congregation; Arthur Clark, who read the chapter on the congregation's critical decision to remain a downtown church; Phyllis Supple, who distilled portions of the manuscript for entries in the Newsletter; Margaret Q. Keller, who read the entire manuscript in its nearly final form; Rev. Phyllis Kort, who closely read and corrected a revised draft, as did Dewey Lawson. Essential too has been the collection of Sunday bulletins with meticulous notes recording Sunday worship details at First Church from the late 1940s to the 1970s by Dorothy N. Rankin, who also donated an extensive collection of photographs depicting identified members of various youth choirs and activities of the Women of the Church. Noteworthy too is the generosity of the family of Rev. David Scanlon in donating a large collection of that Pastor's scrapbooks. Appreciated as well is the "use of Sanborn Maps 1898, 1902, 1907, 1913, and 1937 Durham NC reprinted/used with permission from the Sanborn Library, LLC." Funding of this project of long duration has been generously provided

by the Presbyterian Women and the Session of First Presbyterian Church. For their vital help, I am indebted.

As this long-running project approached its conclusion, a team of six stalwart copy editors, drawn from among the First Church congregation, went to work on the manuscript draft. The diligent and skilled efforts of Lea Bingham, Carol S. Carson, Dale Gaddis, David Smith, Phyllis Supple, and Jean Wilson substantially improved the quality of the text. For their superb and vital contributions, I am deeply grateful. I am exceedingly grateful as well to Carol S. Carson and David Smith, the former for her extraordinary talent as a photographer and skilled graphic designer that enabled her to produce for the endsheets and dust jacket magnificent displays of First Presbyterian Church's stained glass windows with their Christian symbols, and the latter for his essential assistance with the indices. And above all, thanks beyond all measure are due to Doris Carr Cross who typed and retyped the manuscript as the author added newly discovered information, explored subjects from different perspectives, encountered difficult formatting problems, or just changed his mind! Her patience, perseverance, and diligence surely place her among the Elect. Finally, my gratitude goes out to Scott Sipe of Carolina Academic Press for his encouragement in the publication of this story of an important Durham institution and to Grace Pledger whose meticulous and skillful editing produced a book of impressive dimensions and quality.

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