



A Bit Of Church History *First United Methodist Church of Las Vegas, NM*

The Arrival of Methodism in New Mexico

Methodism likely came to New Mexico with the Army of the West, and there are records of early Methodist missionaries preaching in Santa Fe (probably at Fort Marcy) and later at Fort Union in the 1850s. However, the effort sputtered until the arrival of the Rev. Thomas Harwood in 1869.

Harwood traveled thousands of miles around New Mexico, preaching the gospel and encouraging the development of schools. Together with his wife, Emily, they established both a church and a school in Tiptonville, which served as a base for his travels.

Founding the Las Vegas Church

In 1872, Harwood met with a few Methodists in Las Vegas and advised them to form a temporary affiliation with the Presbyterian Mission. With the arrival of the railroad in 1879, other Methodists joined, and by August of that year, they organized a congregation with 16 charter members.

Things moved quickly. That September, the Bishop arrived with the first local minister, the Rev. D.W. Calfee. They secured lots on what was called “**Zion Hill**” (possibly because the Episcopal Church was also organizing there at the time).

Constructing the Church

By October, a contract had been let for construction of a frame building (30 by 45 feet), and the new church was dedicated in **February 1880**.

As the congregation grew, a two-room addition was built. The sanctuary eventually had to expand: by 1922, with membership near 300, the need for a larger structure was obvious. A contract was signed with local builder and church member **Mauritz Martinsen Sundt (M.M. Sundt)** for a new brick building.

The Work of M.M. Sundt

M.M. Sundt's story is a tale in itself, but it suffices to say he was responsible for many iconic buildings in Las Vegas.

The old frame church was sold to the Normal School (now Highlands University) and moved across the street to the Science **Building** on University Avenue. The new brick church was dedicated with a week-long series of events in **March 1923**.

Educational Wing & Legacy

There is some confusion around when the education wing was built, but it likely dates to the **late 1950s**. More information will follow on the history of:

- The organ.
- The stained-glass windows.
- M.M. Sundt.
- Other historic items of interest.