

Cameron Church Looks Forward To The Next 100 Years

■ by Peggy Malchow

Cameron Church, on the southeast corner of South Pearl Street and East Iowa Avenue, is familiar to many present day south Denver residents as a concert venue for Swallow Hill Music Association, and other performance-based groups.

But, long-time residents know Cameron as a storied member of the local church community for

more than a century.

The original congregation, numbering just five members, was organized on September 30, 1888 as Fleming's Grove Methodist Church. (Fleming's Grove was the original name of the settlement in the area near S. Logan St. and E. Florida Ave. that is now known as Platt Park.)

According to J. Alton Templin, a historian at Iliff School of Theology, Cameron stands today as the oldest continuing

Methodist congregation in south Denver.

The church was renamed in 1890 after receiving what was then a monumental donation from a gentleman named Cameron. "The church legend is that the size of the gift was \$250," says Bill Kirton, the congregation's current minister. "A name change would cost somewhat more these days."

That same year marked com-

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pletion of the congregation's first home on the southwest corner of Iowa and Washington. Now a private residence, over the years the building has served as home to such diverse occupants as a Swedish Methodist congregation, and a 1980's rock group known as The Primates.

The present building was constructed between 1909 and 1913, at a cost of \$35,000. Thomas P. Barber, a Colorado Springs architect, designed the structure. Frank Watkins, whose family still operates a stained glass studio in



■ The Cameron Church Women's Bible Study class, circa 1917.

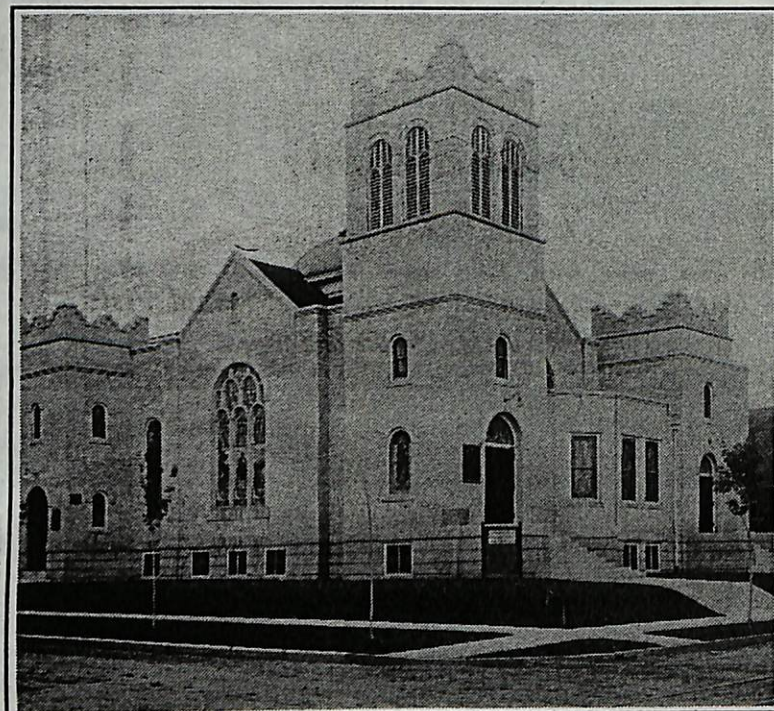
Littleton, designed the four large stained glass windows, importing the material from across the United States and cutting and assembling the pieces on site.

University of Denver Chancellor H.A. Buchtel (for whom Buchtel Blvd. is named) laid the cornerstone for the church on March 9, 1913, and the building was dedicated in July of that year by Rev. Thomas Corwin Iliff (cousin of John Wesley Iliff, the namesake of Iliff School of Theology and Iliff Avenue).

"The building itself has fascinating architectural features," points out Suzanne Meier, an architectural historian and member of the church's building committee. "The exterior is a composite style, predominantly Romanesque with some Gothic elements, evidenced by the square towers and rounded arches over the doors and windows."

"Inside, the building is characteristic of the Neoclassical style,

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■ The cornerstone for Cameron Church was laid on March 9, 1913. The building was dedicated in July of that year.

which became popular - primarily for Protestant churches - in the late 1700's. Details typifying this style include dentils (squared-off protruding mouldings), pilasters (squared columns topped with Corinthian capitals), and bands of egg-and-dart moulding around the ceiling and the altar area."

The domed ceiling in the sanctuary is 150 feet from the floor at its highest point, and capped by a round stained-glass window in a floral pattern. "Particularly in the sanctuary, the architecture shows wonderful balance, proportion, and symmetry," said Meier.

During much of its history, the church served as a center for the community. Basketball league games were played in the church basement; sewing groups made clothes and blankets for the poor; plays, pageants and musicals were presented to the community; and concerts were given by a church orchestra. From its five founding members, the church grew to over 600 in the 1960's.

In recent years, as churches have played a decreasing role in community social life, and as the congregation has aged, membership has declined. Kirton came to the church in 1992 with the assignment of revitalizing the congregation by bringing in a new crop of younger singles and families.

Though the spirit of the current congre-

gation remains strong, the years have taken their toll on the condition of the building itself. Much renovation work is needed to restore the church to its original elegance, but resources are lacking.

"Modernizing plumbing, electrical, and heating systems, and meeting code requirements have had to take financial precedence over redecorating," said Mike Taber, chairman of the church's building

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committee. "We know that we have an architectural gem here, and making the building shine as it once did is high on the agenda."

Cameron will hold fundraising events throughout the coming year to raise money for the needed renovations to this valued part of south Denver history.