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**HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION:
“THE METHODIST BUILDING” AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF PUBLIC
PROTESTANTISM, 1916-1936**

Kurt F. Adams

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the history of the Methodist Building in Washington, D.C., in order to understand how the building exhibited aspirations for public Protestantism during the Prohibition era. Over four chronological chapters, this dissertation examines how the Methodist Building was a contested site, revealing the tensions of race, nation, religion, and politics in twentieth-century American Methodist identity. The project focuses on how the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals of the Methodist Episcopal Church wanted to construct the Methodist Building to announce the national ambitions of Methodism and counter perceived influences of Catholicism in Washington; how the Board employed material culture and public ceremonies to position the new Methodist Building as a platform for public Protestantism that would reform the nation; how the public Protestantism that the Board sought to embody in the Methodist Building sparked a debate over whether it was a lobby; and the campaign to make the Methodist Building the headquarters of the new national Methodist Church once the Northern and Southern branches reunited in 1939. Close examination of the Methodist Building illustrates how the Board used the building to argue for the moral and cultural authority of Methodism and Protestantism in society, and how others challenged that public role.

This study of the Methodist Building invites a reconsideration of the early twentieth-century era of Methodist and mainline Protestant institution building. This thematic research challenges the view that Methodist institution building during this period was an afterthought or even a declension to the nineteenth-century revivals and itinerant preaching. A deeper appreciation of the institutions and physical structures Methodists built during the early twentieth century helps to explain how this religious tradition transitioned from a revivalist movement into

a settled denomination, and finally to become a part of the Protestant mainline establishment. Instead of a clandestine network of Protestant influence in seemingly secular institutions, the Methodist Building and the Board leaders who built it reveals the aspirational role for Protestantism in American public life and culture.

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Introduction

In Mark Tooley's polemic, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, he described the decline of the United Methodist Church (UMC) to liberalism and his call for "the reclamation of the United Methodist Church for Christ-centered biblical beliefs."¹ An outspoken conservative critic of the church, Tooley dedicated himself to preserve the UMC's prohibition on LGBT ministers and its condemnation of homosexuality. Since 2009, Tooley has also served as the president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD), a conservative think tank monitoring the social positions of several mainline Protestant denominations. First founded in 1981, the IRD originally criticized mainline denominations' support of leftist revolutionaries in Latin America and opposed the National Council of Churches, an ecumenical Protestant organization, for its outreach to ministers in the Soviet Union. By the 2000s, the IRD had evolved from its Reagan-era Cold War politics into an organization that insisted on preserving "theological orthodoxy" and reducing the liberal influence of church leaders in the UMC, the Episcopal Church, and the Presbyterian Church, USA. In the midst of Bush-era culture wars, a 2004 *New York Times* article described the IRD as attempting to engineer theologically conservative takeovers of mainline denominations akin to the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s.²

Yet, for a manifesto whose purpose was to prescribe how to reclaim theological orthodoxy in the UMC, Tooley devoted a significant amount of his book to religious buildings. He opened with a discussion of the Interchurch Center, the ecumenical Protestant building

¹ Mark Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, (Anderson, Indiana: Bristol House, 2010), 17.

² Laurie Goodstein and David D. Kirkpatrick, "Conservative Group Amplifies Voice of Protestant Orthodoxy," *New York Times*, May 22, 2004.

constructed in 1958 in the liberal, intellectual Manhattan neighborhood of Morningside Heights. Colloquially referred to as the “God Box,” the Interchurch Center is adjacent to the Riverside Church and Union Theological Seminary, institutions Tooley described as “flagships of the once ascendant liberal mainline Protestantism in America.”³ Tooley explained that the Interchurch Center was the headquarters of the UMC’s missionary board called the “General Board of Global Missions.” He suggested that New York City corrupted the missionary board, propelling the agency to become profligate, spending on office space and administrator salaries at the expense of sending missionaries abroad.⁴ Tooley further painted New York’s liberalism as distorting the focus of the missionary agency from evangelical conversion to supporting Marxist revolutionaries in the developing world by funding the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, Marxist rebels in El Salvador, and Communists in Vietnam. When the missions agency moved out of the Interchurch Center to relocate to Atlanta in 2014, Tooley and his organization celebrated the move to the South as “a much healthier spiritual environment” and claimed the withdrawal from the Interchurch Center as evidence the move was “shifting the [missions] agency away from left-wing politics to focus more on evangelism.”⁵ In his book, Tooley also castigated Foundry UMC, a church in downtown Washington, D.C., as another Methodist institution that succumbed to the worldly, corrupting influence of liberalism. Foundry UMC, Tooley contended, had sacrificed its theological orthodoxy to welcome “homosexuals attracted to the [Dupont Circle] area’s

³ “Our History,” *The Interchurch Center*, accessed January 30, 2017, <http://interchurch-center.org/our-history/>. Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, 9-10.

⁴ Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, 5-17.

⁵ “GOOD NEWS: UMC Missions Agency Moving to Atlanta and Overseas,” *UM Action* (Winter 2014): 4.

architectural charm” and as well as then-President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.⁶

But it was neither the Interchurch Center in the nation’s largest city, nor the church of the nation’s president that most symbolized Methodism’s corruption; to Tooley, the smaller, simpler “Methodist Building” on Capitol Hill epitomized the mainline denomination’s decline. Located across from the U.S. Capitol Building and the Supreme Court Building on a triangular lot, the angular white limestone Methodist Building was built in 1923-1924 to be the headquarters for the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals (hereafter “the Board”) of the former Methodist Episcopal Church. Tooley explained that the Board’s mission was to advocate for strong Prohibition enforcement and oppose other social vices such as gambling, smoking, and motion pictures. “The edifice was to model and advocate on behalf of Christian virtues, temperance above all,” he wrote, personifying the building and granting the building, not the organization, the agency.⁷

A September 2007 scene that Tooley observed at the Methodist Building illustrated how far Methodism had strayed. On the Methodist Building’s front lawn, the Board’s successor agency, the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), organized an interfaith fast during Ramadan to protest the war in Iraq. GBCS General Secretary Jim Winkler stood on the lawn with representatives from other mainline Protestant denominations, the National Council of Churches, the Islamic Society of North America, and Reform Judaism. The Reform Jewish Rabbi, Debra Kolodny, who had published a book on bisexual people of faith, stood on the lawn of the United Methodist Building to protest the war. “The old temperance crusaders likely never

⁶ Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, 18–20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

foresaw that the fruits of their labors would include [Kolodny] the author of *Blessed Bi-Spirit*, or the Islamic Society of North America,” wrote Tooley.⁸ The interfaith, anti-war protest symbolized the perversion, or declension, from the Methodist Building as the center for Methodist temperance and Prohibition advocacy. The protest epitomized the half-century of populating the Methodist Building with “apologists for communism’s worst tyrannies,” “zealots of population control,” and “interest groups... [whose] aim was social, political, and sexual revolution.”⁹

The change Tooley described at the Methodist Building between 1923 and 2007 is a specific example emblematic of the broader, liberalizing trend within mainline Protestantism over the twentieth century. Robert P. Jones, in his 2016 monograph, *The End of White Christian America*, uses the Methodist Building to serve as an example of this trend. Jones described the construction of the Methodist Building in 1923 as indicative of the “white mainline Protestant optimism,” seeking to restore the place of Christian values in U.S. government. The monetary pledges Methodists gave to fund the Methodist Building showed how much broad support there was for a center for supporting the country’s commitment to Protestant morality, or what historian William Hutchison described as the “establishment faith” during the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Prohibition’s repeal in 1933 foreshadowed the declining cultural relevance of mainline Protestantism in American public life, followed by the election of the nation’s first (and only) Catholic U.S. President, John F. Kennedy in 1960, and with immigration reform in the

⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁹ Ibid., 97.

¹⁰ Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 8-11; William R. Hutchison, *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

1960s, a growing population of Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu communities.¹¹ Mainline Protestantism declined in cultural prominence, as historian David Hollinger described how mainline Protestants, whom he prefers to call “ecumenical Protestants,” embraced values of cosmopolitanism, diversity, social justice, and sexual liberalism during the Civil Rights Era and sexual revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s.¹² As evidence of this transformation, Jones points to how the Methodist Building became a gathering place for groups organizing for civil rights, the Equal Rights Amendment and Vietnam War protesters. By the close of the century, the Methodist Building’s tenants included the Islamic Society, Catholic World Relief Services, and Seventh-Day Adventists.¹³ However, while Jones described the transformation of the Methodist Building from the perspective of a scholarly observer, Tooley shared the perspective commonly held among white, evangelical Protestants. He characterized the specific change in the Methodist Building between 1923 and 2007 as the decline of American Methodism.¹⁴ “The patriarchs of the Old Temperance Board had seen a nation that was bound for Zion,” Tooley wrote. “But their ecclesiastical successors saw only a corrupt and oppressive America.”¹⁵ American Methodism had strayed from attempting to align the nation’s laws with Methodist teachings on temperance in favor of promoting diversity, pluralism, and liberal political values.

¹¹ Robert T. Handy, “The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935,” *Church History* 29, no. 1 (March 1960): 3–16; Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹² Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

¹³ Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, 14.

¹⁴ For example, Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, 97.

Yet what makes Tooley's variation on this familiar declension narrative unique is his choice to use a single building to represent decline. The Methodist Building served as a synecdoche, a rhetorical device used for a part to represent the whole: to Tooley, the Methodist Building on Capitol Hill symbolized everything wrong with American Methodism at the turn of the twenty-first century. But Tooley's objection to the liberalizing trends at the Methodist Building are more than symbolic or rhetorical. He used the Methodist Building to frame a larger conversation about Methodism's proper relationship to politics, the state, theology, and the nature and role of the church. This dissertation argues that the Methodist Building has historically been a site of conflict over its religious meanings, sitting at the fault lines of Methodist identity in the twentieth century. A close examination of the Methodist Building reveals the entanglements of race, nation, religion, and politics in twentieth-century American Methodist identity.

This dissertation's focus on the Methodist Building helps to expand the field of Methodist studies, which has paid scant attention to the twentieth-century era of institution building. The vast majority of scholarship focuses on the eighteenth and nineteenth century revival movements and itinerant preachers, implicitly or explicitly treating the early twentieth-century period of urban institution building as a decline. This work serves as historiographical corrective, arguing for the significance of the early twentieth century in Methodist studies. Furthermore, this dissertation advocates further study of mainline Protestant buildings and institutions to better appreciate the mainline's identity as the establishment. The building is not representative of all mainline Protestant buildings, or even all Methodist buildings, but as one of the largest branches of mainline Protestantism, the study of this specific building in American Methodism invites scholars of mainline Protestantism to devote more attention to the institution-

building, in order to foster a deeper understanding of how and why buildings and institutions were significant to constructing the religious identities and practices of other groups of mainline Protestants.

Temperance, Prohibition, and a Changing Board in a Changing Methodism

The construction of the Methodist Building emerged as a product of the growing bureaucratization of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), specifically the MEC's temperance organization, which built and owned the Methodist Building. The *Discipline*, the MEC book of church law, included some degree of prohibition on the consumption, sale, and production of alcoholic beverages among church members and ministers since 1788, but the MEC moved to institutionalize its commitment to temperance at the opening of the twentieth century.¹⁶ As historian William McGuire King observed, Protestant denominations developed bureaucratic structures in the early twentieth century as part of an effort to modernize. This trend to build institutions manifested itself in the MEC during this period as the church developed a series of "boards," or bureaucratic denomination-wide programmatic agencies, governed with a corporate structure.¹⁷ In 1904, the MEC General Conference, the church's highest-law making body that met every four years to revise the *Discipline*, established the Church Temperance Society. This

¹⁶ Richard Morgan Cameron, *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective* (New York: Abingdon, 1961), 133–137. The *Disciplines* of the 1780s includes some of the earliest prohibitions on alcohol in Methodism, but these emphasized the making, buying and selling of, not consumption of alcohol or drunkenness. From 1788 to 1844 (when the churches split into northern and southern branches) the *Disciplines* required ministers to answer affirmatively a question that stated: "Do you chuse [*sic*] and use water for your common drink? And only take wine medicinally or sacramentally?"

¹⁷ William McGuire King, "Denominational Modernization and Religious Identity: The Case of the Methodist Episcopal Church," in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 1993), 343–55.

was the first time the MEC organized a bureaucratic entity devoted to enacting the church's commitment to temperance.¹⁸

The Church Temperance Society served as the denomination's temperance education agency, publishing material on temperance and organizing among MEC members to abstain voluntarily from alcohol consumption. Its mission, outlined by the *Discipline*, also mandated that in addition to its educational focus, the Society would advocate for the "successful opposition to the organized traffic in intoxicating liquors," reflecting the growing movement in American politics to outlaw alcohol.¹⁹ The *Discipline* mandated the Church Temperance Society be based in Chicago, and be governed by a board of fifteen managers with a MEC Bishop as its president. In the following years, the bureaucratic entity grew, joining the Boards of Education, Church Extension Board, Freedmen's Aid Society, Young People's Society, and Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Societies. The 1908 General Conference allocated \$25,000 per year for the Society (though contributions from churches were voluntary and therefore not guaranteed) and in 1910, the managers hired the first full-time minister to staff the Church Temperance Society. The selection of the Reverend Dr. Clarence True Wilson, a MEC minister serving a congregation in Portland, Oregon to serve as the Society's chief executive officer, called a "General Secretary," became critical in solidifying the organization's growth as a bureaucratic agency of the MEC. Wilson, who served as General Secretary until his retirement 1936, not only was an unapologetic advocate of temperance and prohibition, he also worked to establish the legitimacy of the

¹⁸ Joseph Land Allen, "The Methodist Board of Temperance as an Instrument of Church Policy" (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1957), 56–57.

¹⁹ Edward G. Andrews, ed., *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (New York: Eaton & Maine, 1904), 10–11.

fledgling Society (later Board) within the MEC, and first promoted the idea of the Methodist Building.²⁰

Founded as a temperance agency, the organization's identity closely followed the trajectory of the alcohol prohibition movement. As the political movement for prohibition, led by the Anti-Saloon League, shifted from statewide referenda to a national prohibition campaign after 1913, the MEC followed suit. The 1912 General Conference directed the Church Temperance Society to relocate from Chicago to Topeka, Kansas to help organize statewide campaigns for prohibition in the Midwest and Western states.²¹ In 1916, the body once again directed the Church Temperance Society to move, this time to Washington, D.C. in order to establish a presence nation's capital.²² The campaign for national prohibition heightened the influence that Protestant moral reform organizations—what historian Gaines Foster calls “the Christian lobby”—sought to have over Congressional legislation, as organizations like the Anti-Saloon League, the International Reform Bureau, and the American Sabbath Union had had presences in Washington since the 1890s.²³ In addition to moving the Church Temperance Society to Washington, the MEC signaled its ambition to join this cohort of Christian lobbyists influencing federal moral legislation by also renaming the organization the “Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals,” hoping to later lobby for bans on tobacco,

²⁰ Allen, “The Methodist Board of Temperance as an Instrument of Church Policy,” 59–60; Robert Dean McNeil, *Valiant for Truth: Clarence True Wilson and Prohibition, A Story of Prohibition and One of Its Leading Advocates* (Portland, Ore.: Oregonians Concerned about Addiction Problems, 1992), 29–32.

²¹ “Pacific Coast Campaign,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, June 1914.

²² K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). H.R. Wedderspoon, “Reports of the Committee on Temperance,” *Daily Christian Advocate* XVIII, no. 24 (May 27, 1916): 460–61.

²³ Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

gambling, and child labor, among other concerns.²⁴ As chapter one demonstrates, the Board's new name reflected that the MEC saw the enactment of national prohibition as the beginning of a triumphal era in which Methodists would influence federal legislation. The short-lived career of national Prohibition, ratified by the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919 and repealed by the Twenty First Amendment in 1933, also presented a change in the Board's identity. As the Board shifted its program to an educational focus on alcohol abuse and promoted voluntary abstinence from alcohol among church members, the Board's name was shortened to the "Board of Temperance" in 1939, at the same time the MEC reunited with its southern counterpart, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS).²⁵

By mid-century, with Prohibition a distant memory, the organization embraced an identity akin to historian David Hollinger's "ecumenical Protestants" as the board expanded to address peace and justice issues. The 1960 General Conference consolidated the Board of Temperance with the Board of World Peace and the Board of Social and Economic Relations, creating a new entity called the "Board of Christian Social Concerns" (BCSC). The former boards became "divisions" of the new BCSC, with the former Temperance Board becoming the "Division on Alcohol Problems and General Welfare."²⁶ The wider range of issues in the new Board's portfolio meant that temperance and alcohol use were no longer its primary focus. When the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren in 1968 to form the "United

²⁴ Wedderspoon, "Reports of the Committee on Temperance," *Daily Christian Advocate*. "Minutes of the Board of Managers Meeting," January 15, 1924, Records of the General Welfare Division of the General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

²⁵ Allen, "The Methodist Board of Temperance as an Instrument of Church Policy," 160.

²⁶ Methodist Church (U.S.) and Emory S. Bucke, *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1960* (Nashville: Methodist Pub. House, 1960), Board of Christian Social Concerns, §1526.

Methodist Church,” the BCSC subsequently consolidated with its counterpart agency, the Department of Christian Social Action. At this time, the Board evolved into its current organizational iteration, the “General Board of Church and Society” (GBCS). The Division’s title also was truncated to the “Division of General Welfare” in 1972, situating alcohol consumption in the more neutral, universal language of public health.²⁷

This organization’s series of name changes over the twentieth century reveal the changing attitudes and approaches to social reform within American Methodism. In addition, the changing organizational identities point to the significance of the Methodist Building as a site of contested religious meanings. Because the various boards executed their respective social missions from the offices of the Methodist Building, the structure serves a synecdoche for the transformations of Methodism and mainline Protestantism in the twentieth century. It is also a site that reveals the fissures over those transformations. Both the Board and its critics have projected meanings on to it. While Tooley lamented the Methodist Building as a site of interfaith antiwar protest, the Board’s successor organization celebrated the building as “sacred space” on Capitol Hill, citing it as a gathering place for Vietnam War protests, the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign, supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.²⁸

Prohibition and “Public Protestantism”

Prohibition’s brief, thirteen-year interlude in American law and politics may appear as an anomaly in the histories of public policy, politics, or government, but the legalized nationwide

²⁷ United Methodist Church et al., *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Pub. House, 1973), General Board of Church and Society § 954, 963, 965.

²⁸ “History of United Methodist Building,” accessed April 3, 2017, <https://umc-gbcs.org/about-us/the-united-methodist-building>.

prohibition of alcohol represented a major cultural victory for American Christians. American Protestants, including Methodists, had advocated for temperance since at least the late eighteenth century. (Methodist founder John Wesley first advocated abstinence from distilled liquor on a personal, individual basis, in an effort to move closer toward Christian perfection. He considered the production of distilled liquor exploitative to the poor because the grain used to produce liquor could have been instead used to produce bread for the hungry.²⁹) By the mid-nineteenth century, evangelical Protestant denominations widely supported temperance, forming denominational and inter-denominational temperance societies. Antebellum evangelicals employed the method of moral suasion to persuade others to adopt voluntary abstinence from alcoholic beverages, asking individuals to sign pledges of “teetotalism.”³⁰ After the Civil War, Methodist Frances Willard and other women founded the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874, which valorized women’s roles in the Victorian-era domestic space as wives and mothers.³¹

²⁹ Cameron, *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective*, 47–52.

³⁰ Temperance reform in antebellum America is well-covered in the literature. Some key texts include: Thomas R. Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002); David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³¹ Alison Parker, *Purifying America the Women’s Reform Movement and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1883-1933* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1901* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*.

The formation of the Anti-Saloon League in 1895 represented a significant shift in American Protestant strategies toward alcohol, now advocating for government outlaw of alcohol, commonly referred to as prohibition. Whereas the WCTU and the antebellum evangelicals often focused on the domestic space, the Anti-Saloon League focused its attention on “the saloon,” seeking to apply Christian morality to spaces outside the home. Historian Gaines Foster argues that with its Progressive-era hierarchical bureaucracy, a national board, state directors, and grassroots organizers, the Anti-Saloon League brought Protestant churches into politics with the expressed goal of pressuring state and local governments to align with American Protestant definitions of morality. When the Anti-Saloon League shifted its focus in 1913 from organizing prohibition at the state level to pursue national prohibition through a Constitutional amendment, the organization mobilized its followers with the goal of aligning federal law with Protestant Christian morality.³²

The ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919 (going into effect in 1920), which prohibited the production, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages, represented a triumph for Protestants seeking to align American law and culture with an explicit Protestant understanding of morality. Historians of religion have recognized Prohibition as significant Protestant cultural victory, and its repeal in 1933 as a substantial defeat to Protestant leadership in American culture.³³ I contend that Prohibition represents the high-water mark of what scholars

³² Foster, *Moral Reconstruction*, 171–220.

³³ Jason S. Lantzer, “*Prohibition Is Here to Stay*”: *The Reverend Edward S. Shumaker and the Dry Crusade in America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 3–4; Handy, “The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935,” 12; Foster, *Moral Reconstruction*, 220; Paul A. Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel; Social and Political Liberalism in American Protestant Churches, 1920-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 34–42; John F. Wilson, *Public Religion in American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 15.

refer to as “public Protestantism.” As I define it, public Protestantism refers to open assertions of an explicit Protestant identity and claims to the authority to shape morality in American life because of that Protestant identity. Clarence True Wilson asserted public Protestantism in his 1913 publication, *Dry or Die*, in which he called for “Christian citizenship,” which to him meant “being a Christian at the polls” in order to fight the liquor traffic. Though he does not employ the term public Protestantism, Wilson’s call for active participation in American democratic institutions on the basis of a Christian identity in order to align laws with Protestant Christian morality exemplifies my use of the term. (Wilson excluded Catholics from his Christian citizenship because he considered the Roman Catholic Church to not be Christian, as well as supportive of the sale of liquor.)³⁴ My definition of public Protestantism builds upon, but is also distinguished from other scholars’ use of the term, most notably Catherine Albanese, who argues public Protestantism shaped American institutions and values, such as democracy, religious freedom, and voluntary assembly, because of the historically dominant role Protestantism has exercised in American culture. I agree with Albanese and Finbarr Curtis who each suggest Protestantism bequeathed a set of institutions and institutional practices to American democracy following the disestablishment from the First Amendment but I am more interested in the term to conceptualize the *publicity* of Protestantism in American life.³⁵

³⁴ Clarence True Wilson, *Dry or Die: The Anglo-Saxon Dilemma*. (Topeka, Kan.: Temperance Society, 1913), 209–221, 72.

³⁵ Albanese and Curtis each locate public Protestantism’s origins in nineteenth-century evangelical movements following the disestablishment by the First Amendment. While Albanese suggests the democratic institutions that evangelicalism produced were emancipatory, Curtis argues they were coercive, producing forms of governance. Curtis’ intervention is part of a broader debate about whether nineteenth-century evangelicalism was authoritarian or democratic. Curtis’ work triangulates between Nathan Hatch and Amanda Porterfield’s arguments about whether evangelicalism was democratizing or authoritarian. Building upon John Lardas Modern’s Foucauldian analysis of evangelicalism who sees it as a disciplinary form of governance, Curtis also argues for a more coercive reading of evangelicalism. Evangelicalism

My understanding of public Protestantism builds upon Albanese and Curtis's critical observations about the outsized role that Protestant Christianity exercised in shaping American social institutions and culture, asking how that privileged status informed Protestant aspirations for authority and recognition in public life. The explicit visibility of public Protestantism poses a direct contrast to the scholarly study of secularism in American religious history. Historians of religion Tracy Fessenden and John Lardas Modern each argue that the secular in American culture contains an unmarked or latent Protestantism even as it claims universality and neutrality; though they study the New England Puritan tradition and nineteenth-century evangelicals respectively, each describes the secular as Protestant practices and values that are performed as universal. By contrast, the concept of public Protestantism enables us to recognize when and how Protestant values and practices are performed as openly Protestant. Because of that visibility and historic status as the dominant religion in American culture, public Protestantism claims a universal applicability to shaping American government and morals.³⁶

Prohibition represents the ambitions of public Protestantism—and not the secularism that Fessenden and Modern chart—because the Protestant advocates of Prohibition fashioned themselves as the Protestant establishment, seeking to align American law and policy with Protestant Christian values. For this reason, my definition of public Protestantism builds upon scholarly ideas about Protestantism as the establishment religious tradition in American history

did not produce social control, but it did produce social norms. Catherine Albanese, *America: Religion and Religions*, 4th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Thomson/Wadsworth, 1981), 248–260. Finbarr Curtis, *The Production of American Religious Freedom* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 6–26. See also: Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (University of Chicago Press, 2011); Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

³⁶ Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*; Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

and culture. Like Albanese's claims about the influence of Protestantism on American democratic institutions, the concept of the Protestant establishment also centers and makes visible Protestantism's influence in American society. In his edited volume on Protestantism in the first half of the twentieth-century, historian of religion William Hutchison proposes the idea of Protestant establishment to conceptualize Protestantism as the historically privileged and dominant religious tradition seeking to maintain its status and influence. Similarly, other contributors in that volume point to the ecumenical Federal Council of Churches and describe Protestant reform organizations of the "reform establishment" as evidence of Protestants coming together in order to exercise influence and power in American public life. Hutchison and the cohort of authors characterize the Protestant establishment as yearning for recognition and validation from the state, universities, and other social institutions. Because Hutchison describes the Protestant establishment as persistent in its desire to maintain cultural hegemony, this observation implies a degree of anxiety about the Protestant establishment's role in public life; as Wilson's understanding of "Christian citizenship" implies, the authority of Protestantism is not automatically conferred by society, but requires a consistent public presence to persuade the state and other institutions to take Protestant voices seriously.³⁷

The almost anxious yearning for recognition outlines the ambivalent relationship that the Protestant establishment—and in the form of public Protestantism—has with the idea of America as a Christian nation. As William McGuire King writes in his essay in the Hutchinson volume, social reformers from the Protestant establishment navigated a tension of claiming authority on the basis that America was already Christianized and arguing for the need of more

³⁷ William R. Hutchison, *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), vii, 97, 132.

Christianization.³⁸ This ambivalence and tension in public Protestantism stands in contrast to David Sehat's claims that the U.S. was a *de facto* Christian nation. Like Hutchinson, Sehat's use of the term "moral establishment" implies Protestantism was the establishment religious tradition, but unlike Hutchison, Sehat describes the state lending its institutional support to enforce Protestant Christian morality, thus making the U.S. a Christian nation in practice, even if law required a separation of church and state. The two scholars differ in their account of the tone and direction of the Protestant establishment's authority: while Sehat argues that the state conferred Protestantism its establishment status by endorsing Protestant values, Hutchison emphasizes how the Protestant establishment anxiously sought to maintain and seek recognition for its historically privileged status.³⁹ Gaines Foster is correct to argue that Prohibition did not make the United States into a Christian nation because it did not install a Christian government, and did not transform American democratic institutions into a theocracy. And, as Kevin Kruse argues, the idea of the United States as a Christian nation is a relatively recent invention, dating only to the 1930s and 1940s, the brainchild of businessmen and corporations who wanted to resist New Deal liberalism.⁴⁰

Wilson actually called the U.S. a Christian nation, but to him this appellation referred to the historical influence Protestant Christianity had on shaping American democracy. He did not use the term to suggest the country was or should be a theocracy, to paraphrase Foster, or that Protestant Christianity enjoyed state sanction, as Sehat's use of the term implies. By contrast,

³⁸ William McGuire King, "The Reform Establishment and the Ambiguities of Influence," in *Between the Times*, ed. Hutchinson, 122-139.

³⁹ David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁴⁰ Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015). Foster, *Moral Reconstruction*, 220.

Wilson's understanding of Christian nation meant that the principles of American democracy derived from the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, the Ten Commandments, and the stories of the Hebrew Bible. Because of this history, Wilson argued that Protestants had the obligation to assist the government "to furnish a fulcrum of uplift for the moral betterment of mankind," not to unite the church and state. His ideas of the U.S. as a Christian nation reflect the central assumptions of public Protestantism, claiming the authority of Protestants to participate in American democracy *as Protestants* because of the outsize influence Protestant Christianity had on shaping American democratic traditions and institutions.⁴¹

As public Protestantism is related to but not equivalent with the concept of the U.S. as a Christian nation, neither is it synonymous with American civil religion. Sociologist of religion Robert N. Bellah argues that American civil religion is the "public religious dimension" as expressed through a collection of symbols, figures, rituals, and sacred texts. According to Bellah, who primarily reads presidential inaugural addresses, American civil religion interprets the themes and narratives of American history through biblical archetypes, likening America to Israel and Europe to Egypt, Washington to Moses, Lincoln and the Civil War to themes of Christ's death, sacrifice, and resurrection, and the Declaration of Independence as a sacred text. American civil religion invokes biblical themes such as a God active in history and sacrificial redemption, but its symbols, texts, and prophets are grounded in American history.⁴² More recently, Jeffrey Meyer has offered a civil religion reading of the built environment of Washington, D.C., treating the capital as Jerusalem, and Jonathan Ebel studied American soldiers from a civil religion approach, suggesting soldiers are Christ-like figures, sacrificing

⁴¹ Clarence True Wilson, *The Divine Right of Democracy; Or, The People's Right to Rule: A Study in Citizenship*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1922), 63–98.

⁴² Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1–21.

their bodies for American democratic values.⁴³ Public Protestantism does not recount American narratives or symbols through civil religious language, but it shares with civil religion an investment in religion informing American public life. Public Protestantism is not American civil religion, just as it does not argue the U.S. is a Christian nation. But both civil religion and a Christian nation enable readers to appreciate how public Protestantism claims authority in American public life. American civil religion and a Christian nation each affirm the influence of Protestantism in shaping American history and culture, an aspiration public Protestantism makes explicit in its pleas for public recognition.

This dissertation looks to understand Prohibition-era public Protestantism through the history of one building, the Methodist Building. As a building constructed to commemorate the achievement of Prohibition, the Methodist Building helps us appreciate how the Board used the Prohibition reform movement to claim moral and cultural authority in American society based upon Methodist social theology. Richard Morgan Cameron explains that Methodists located their calling for social reform in Methodist founder Wesley's doctrine of sanctification and Christian perfectionism. Wesley argued that salvation was a continual process called "sanctification." Contrary to a onetime, isolated event, sanctification entailed moving toward perfection through grace. Wesley added that sanctification was social, not individual, occurring in a broader community. Cameron explained that the doctrine of sanctification fostered a perfectionist ethic among Methodists, generating "a pervasive sense of social responsibility, and a tremendous dynamic for the relief of suffering men, as well as for the reform of the abuses that made them suffer." Methodist theology inspired an impetus for social reform because Methodists believed

⁴³ Jeffrey F. Meyer, *Myths in Stone: Religious Dimensions of Washington, D.C.* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); Jonathan H. Ebel, *G.I. Messiahs: Soldiering, War, and American Civil Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

social ills could be ameliorated just as people moved toward perfection through God's grace.⁴⁴

Because Methodists claimed their social theology as unique from other Protestants, Board leaders envisioned themselves leaders in American social reform.⁴⁵

Though Methodists and the Board fancied themselves as leaders in Prohibition, they were not the only Protestants to endorse it. As other historians have observed, arguably no reform movement more than Prohibition embodied white mainline Protestantism's desire to impose cultural and political authority in the U.S. While the building's original intent to be a monument to Prohibition highlights its identity as *Methodist* building, it also offers a uniquely instructive site to examine the assumed cultural centrality of public Protestantism. The Methodist Building therefore carries implications for how mainline Protestants cultivated power and privilege in shaping their religious identities. Sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow defines mainline Protestantism as a cohort of churches, including the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Presbyterian Church, USA, the United Methodist Church, and the American Baptist Convention. (Other scholars also include the Disciples of Christ in the mainline, dubbing this cohort the pithy title "the Seven Sisters.")⁴⁶ While these religious traditions differ widely in post-Reformation theology, church governance, and liturgical worship style, Wuthnow argues that mainline churches share several important similarities: first, they each organized national denominations in the late nineteenth and early

⁴⁴ Cameron, *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective*, 34–37; S. Paul Schilling, *Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 56–58.

⁴⁵ Some of the best demonstrations of the sense of leadership Wilson envisioned for the Board appears in his discussions of nineteenth-century Methodist history. For example: Clarence True Wilson, *Matthew Simpson: Patriot, Preacher, Prophet* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1929); Clarence True Wilson to Oscar Olson, March 11, 1935, Clarence True Wilson Collection, Methodist Collection - Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

⁴⁶ Jason S. Lantzer, *Mainline Christianity: The Past and Future of America's Majority Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 1–5.

twentieth centuries; second, these national denominations increasingly embraced progressive stances on contemporary social and political issues; third, they actively participated in mid- to late-twentieth-century ecumenical conversations, facilitating greater cooperation; and relatedly, fourth, they actively support(ed) the Federal Council of Churches, now National Council of Churches, aligning themselves with a tradition of public engagement and social action.⁴⁷

Founded to be “the first great Protestant headquarters to represent the moral life” in Washington, D.C., and subsequently the Washington home to various mainline denominations and the National Council of Churches, the Methodist Building illustrates the establishment aspirations and transformations of mainline Protestantism over the twentieth century.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Robert Wuthnow and John Hyde Evans, *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Jason S. Lantzer, *Mainline Christianity: The Past and Future of America's Majority Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2012). Because “mainline Protestantism” as a category focuses on the institutional and organizational characteristics of the religious tradition, I opt for mainline Protestantism over “liberal Protestantism.” Liberal Protestantism traces its historical roots to theological movements in the nineteenth century that emphasized the immanence of God in human history; concepts of love and grace over sinfulness; and biblical-historical criticism. According to historians William Hutchison and Gary Dorrien, liberalism as a theological movement attempted to apply Christian teachings to the modern culture, reflecting liberal Protestants assumptions that human society was moving toward the realization of the Kingdom of God. Twentieth-century theologians criticized liberal theology for its optimism, perhaps none more succinctly than H. Richard Niebuhr’s pithy summary of liberalism: “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988 [1937]), 193. William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1976); Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

⁴⁸ Clarence True Wilson, “The Church in Unending Fight for Moral Issues,” *Christian Advocate*, April 7, 1921; Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 8–14; John Dart, “From Gotham City to Capitol Hill,” *Christian Century*, March 20, 2013.

Scholarly Contributions

As this dissertation argues, examining the Board and its Methodist Building reveal how a bureaucratic entity sits at the fault lines of much of what defined Methodism in the twentieth century. By studying the Methodist Building and the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals which built it, we can better understand twentieth-century Methodist identity, as well as deepen our understanding of Methodist institution building. This claim helps to revise an under-studied and often misrepresented period in Methodist studies, as historians often treat Methodist institution building as a decline from its earlier identity as a revivalist movement. However, as recent social scientific surveys show the continual decline of membership in American Methodist congregations, as well as mainline Protestant congregations in general, examination of buildings and institutions helps readers better understand how imposing stone edifices and large endowments have helped Methodists and mainline Protestants weather their numerical decline.⁴⁹ In addition, this study impacts several scholarly literatures within American religious history, including studies on urban religion, mainline Protestantism, and religious and racial identities.

By studying how Wilson and other leaders of the Board assigned religious meaning to the Methodist Building, this dissertation seeks to improve scholarly understandings of early twentieth-century urban Methodism. Studies on American Methodism concentrate on the early nineteenth-century frontier, primarily focusing on the religious experiences of camp meetings and revivalist preachers.⁵⁰ Whether explicit or implicit, Methodist studies tend to build in a

⁴⁹ “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project*, May 12, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

⁵⁰ See for example: Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*; John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Popularization of American Christianity, 1770-*

declension thesis in the decades and century following the earliest days of the movement. Historians, such as Nathan Hatch, write of the frontier camp meetings as the high point of Methodism, and some, such as John Wigger, cast aspersions on the building of institutional churches in urban centers during the early twentieth century.⁵¹ Historian David Hempton is less critical of early twentieth-century Methodist institution building, but does speculate about whether the bureaucratization of Methodism in the late nineteenth century and the church's investments in property, education, universities, church buildings, and ecclesiastical organization directed the movement away from its earlier revivalism.⁵² As a result, the era of twentieth-century Methodist institution building is frequently a coda in Methodist studies, because scholars contrast the twentieth-century to yearn nostalgically for the earlier dynamism of the camp meeting, the mobility of itinerant preachers, and intimacy of class meetings.⁵³

Among the existing literature on twentieth-century Methodism, the themes have not been particularly productive towards studies of the Board, the Methodist Building, or institution building.⁵⁴ Scholarship on the various mergers within the twentieth century foregrounds

1820 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Hatch and Wigger, eds., *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001); David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion C. 1750-1900*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1996). The journal *Methodist History*, which is the most frequent publisher of scholarly studies on American Methodism, features many articles on the era of the New Republic and antebellum period. Late nineteenth-century world missions appear to be a growing area of interest. In *Methodist History*, John Wesley is the journal's most analyzed historical figure.

⁵¹ Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 173-195.

⁵² Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, 202-210.

⁵³ Thanks to Seth Perry for recommending the use of scholarly nostalgia here.

⁵⁴ Norwood's *American Methodism* is an exception that proves the rule. His book, which aimed to provide a comprehensive denominational history of Methodist churches from the colonial era to the 1970s, is a project of church history, and as such, charts the evolution of bureaucratic and institutional structures. Frederick Abbott Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism; a History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974).

questions of race and theology, but Methodist boards receive little attention. The only exception is sociologist of religion Joseph Land Allen's 1957 dissertation, which examined the Board's transition from a legislative focus to an educational one after the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 and following reunion in 1939. But Allen's interest is primarily in the sociology of church bureaucracy, and he does not connect the Board to broader themes of race, theology, or Methodist identity. Nor does he explore how the physical Methodist Building itself figured into the Board's organizational identity.⁵⁵

Equally important, the literature on twentieth-century Methodism and social issues devotes little study to the Board. Walter Muelder's 1961 study, *Methodism and Society in the Twentieth Century*, is one of the only works that evaluates how the Board embodied Methodist theologies of moral reform.⁵⁶ Muelder's study is hobbled by his treatment of Prohibition and temperance as anomalies from other reform movements championed by liberal mainline Protestants, such as labor, world peace, and civil rights. This is not unique to Muelder, nor to Methodist studies; rather his treatment is reflective of how broader studies on liberal Protestantism, the Social Gospel, and social Christianity describe Prohibition as an exception to the reforms Protestant leaders championed, preferring to focus on more politically successful and reliably liberal movements, such as the civil rights and labor rights movements. Prohibition and temperance are not often included because Prohibition fits less comfortably within the reform impulses of liberal Protestantism.⁵⁷ So, while the Methodist involvement in writing the first

⁵⁵ Allen, "The Methodist Board of Temperance as an Instrument of Church Policy."

⁵⁶ Walter George Muelder, and Board of Social and Economic Relations, *Methodism and Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961).

⁵⁷ Paul A. Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel; Social and Political Liberalism in American Protestant Churches, 1920-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform; from Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955); Robert Moats

iteration of the Federal Council of Churches' Social Creed is well documented, little is written about Methodist involvement in Prohibition. The only studies that mention the MEC, Prohibition, and the Board highlight their absence from the scholarly literatures within twentieth-century Methodist studies and American religious history: a Wilson biography, written by a United Methodist minister that intervenes in no scholarly debates, and three political science monographs on religious lobbies in Washington that mention the Board's successor organization only in passing.⁵⁸ By contrast, this dissertation's focus on the Methodist Building and the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals aims to more accurately represent the history of Methodist institution building, challenging claims of institution building as a declension or epilogue to the early nineteenth century.⁵⁹

When the Methodist Building becomes the point of departure for studying twentieth-century Methodism, we can better understand the entanglements of race, religion, and nation in twentieth-century Methodist identity. The Methodist Building reveals the debates over the proper role of Methodism in national affairs; the role of social reform theology in American Methodism; the relationship between Methodist national ambitions relative to other Christian churches,

Miller, *American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958).

⁵⁸ Only in Steven Tipton's 2008 *Public Pulpits* does the Board's successor organization receive substantive study. Robert Dean McNeil, *Valiant for Truth: Clarence True Wilson and Prohibition: A Story of Prohibition and One of Its Leading Advocates* (Portland: Oregonians Concerned about Addiction Problems, 1992). Allen D. Hertzke, *Representing God in Washington: The Role of Religious Lobbies in the American Polity* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); Daniel J. B. Hofrenning, *In Washington but Not of It: The Prophetic Politics of Religious Lobbyists* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Steven M. Tipton, *Public Pulpits: Methodists and Mainline Churches in the Moral Argument of Public Life* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁵⁹ Declension theses are particularly problematic in American religious historiography since Perry Miller's interpretation of New England Puritanism. Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).

including Roman Catholicism; and the role of a centralized denominational headquarters in national, yet racially segregated church. By interrogating the entanglements of race, nation, and religion, my study of the Methodist Building responds to Matthew Hedstrom's calls for further research on the intertwined racial and religious identities in mainline Protestantism, and complements Christine Rosen and Nathaniel Deutsch's work eugenics and race among religious liberals in the early twentieth century.⁶⁰ The aspirations for the Methodist Building as a symbol of public Protestantism implied assumptions of the centrality of Methodism, and more generally, Protestantism in American culture. As Tracy Fessenden suggests that Protestantism, like whiteness, is unmarked in American culture, both categories acting as the presumed norm or default in contrast to a marked "other."⁶¹ Though the field of American religious history has now absorbed the category of whiteness into its analysis, which has yielded insights on the connections among race, nation, and religion, and theorized white religio-racial identities, I seek to bring this theoretical and historiographical interpretative lens to bear on the mainline Protestant tradition.⁶²

⁶⁰ Matthew Hedstrom, "New Directions in the History of American Religious Liberalism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 1 (2011): 236–47. Nathaniel Deutsch, *Inventing America's "Worst" Family: Eugenics, Islam, and the Fall and Rise of the Tribe of Ishmael* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶¹ Tracy Fessenden, "Forum: American Religion and 'Whiteness,'" *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 10-19.

⁶² Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Edward Blum et al., "Forum: American Religion and 'Whiteness,'" Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ the Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); James B Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Derek Chang, *Citizens of a Christian Nation Evangelical Missions and the Problem of Race in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth A. McAlister, *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); W. Paul Reeve, *Religion*

This project also expands our understanding of the history of urban Christianity, particularly Washington, D.C.⁶³ As historian of religion Robert A. Orsi has argued in his introductory essay to *Gods of the City*, the study of urban religion includes both the lived experiences of and imagined worlds constructed by religious actors in the city.⁶⁴ Washington, D.C. is an exemplary site to examine the overlapping imagined narratives and lived experiences in urban religious history. As the seat of the federal government, the city of Washington was planned as idealized national capital city, and, as the city grew over time, Washington became home to thousands of residents, including a large and important African American community. Washington, D.C. is both the “Federal City” and “Chocolate City.” Although both names are anachronistic for the city during my period of study, (the former being used in the late eighteenth and the latter in the late twentieth century) each city nickname offers heuristic value, highlighting central themes in this project of urban religious history. This study weaves together the imagined city with the lived experience of the city, evaluating how denominations’ desires to establish denominational headquarters or flagship places of worship in the nation’s capital was

of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

⁶³ Four Washington, D.C. studies are listed in Lincoln Mullen and Paul Putz’s database: Morris J. MacGregor, *A Parish for the Federal City: St. Patrick’s in Washington, 1794-1994* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994); James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980); Jeffrey F. Meyer, *Myths in Stone: Religious Dimensions of Washington, D.C.* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); William W. Warner, *At Peace With All Their Neighbors: Catholics and Catholicism in the National Capital, 1787-1860* (Georgetown University, 1994); Lincoln Mullen, “What the Map of Urban Religious Histories Shows Us,” *Religion in American History*, October 23, 2015, <http://lincolnmullen.com/blog/what-the-map-of-city-based-studies-of-american-religion-shows-us/>.

⁶⁴ Robert A. Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 6–64.

informed by or diverged from the lived, social realities of urban life in early twentieth-century Washington. In addition, my dissertation's focus on Washington, D.C., a city south of the Mason-Dixon line known for its regional ambiguity, helps to expand the range of sites included in studies of urban religious history. As historians Lincoln Mullen and Paul Putz have shown, the bulk of urban religion studies concentrate on New York, Chicago, and Detroit, with a few on Boston and Philadelphia, but Washington, D.C. receives little attention.⁶⁵ Although important studies have shed light on the religious histories of other cities south of the Mason-Dixon line, such as New Orleans and Miami, my focus on Washington, D.C. helps broaden our understanding the history of urban Christianity.⁶⁶

Furthermore, this argument about the Methodist Building carries implications for understanding how mainline Protestants used buildings to construct and perform their religious identities, encouraging further study of buildings in mainline Protestantism.⁶⁷ Previous

⁶⁵ Examples of the northern, New York and Chicago focus of urban Christianity include: Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*; Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*; Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Jon Butler, "Religion in New York City: Faith That Could Not Be," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 2 (2004): 51-61; Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jon Butler, "Theory and God in Gotham," *History and Theory* 45, no. 4 (2006): 47-61; Matthew J. Cressler, "Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: African American Catholics in Chicago from Great Migrations to Black Power" (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 2014).

⁶⁶ For Miami and New Orleans, see: Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*, Religion in America Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans*; Ellen Blue, *St. Mark's and the Social Gospel: Methodist Women and Civil Rights in New Orleans, 1895-1965* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011).

⁶⁷ Since the mid-twentieth century, the Board rented office space in the Methodist Building to the ecumenical organization the National Council of Churches, the Presbyterian Church, the UCC, and the Episcopal Church. Lantzer, *Mainline Christianity*, 1; "Methodist Building: Leases,"

scholarship on urban Protestant cathedrals, such as the Riverside Church in the City of New York, YMCA buildings, and Social Gospel Institutional Churches has demonstrated how mainline urban Protestants have historically imbued physical buildings with sacred meanings. The Methodist Building applied elements of each of these architectural trends in urban mainline Protestantism, making it an appropriate structure to examine mainline Protestant affinity for buildings. I join the growing chorus of scholarly voices that examine the vitality of twentieth-century mainline Protestantism, building upon the work of historians of religion Matthew Hedstrom, Elesha Coffman, and Allison Collins Greene who each challenge Robert T. Handy's claim of a "religious depression" in mainline Protestantism during the 1920s and 1930s.⁶⁸

Despite the continual decline of mainline Protestant church membership, as social surveys show, study of mainline Protestant buildings helps readers appreciate how such an emphasis on historic buildings and institutional identity have helped mainline Protestantism survive its diminished

1961-1963, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church Archives – GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

⁶⁸ Coffman uses *The Christian Century* to show the growth and development of the mainline through media, and its aspirational idea through cultural capital. Hedstrom shows that liberal Protestantism responded to the crisis of liberalism in the period by expanding and liberalizing, seeping outside the bounds of organized religion. Greene, likewise, revises Handy's claims of religious depression by arguing for the durability of the Protestant establishment as Social Gospel liberalism informed the New Deal liberalism in the period. Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Alison Collis Greene, *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Handy, "American Religious Depression," 3–16. For more on liberal Protestantism (and religious liberalism more broadly), see: Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); Leigh Eric Schmidt and Sally M. Promey, eds., *American Religious Liberalism*, Religion in North America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); and Gary J. Dorrien's three-volume theological history *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 2003, 2006).

numerical and cultural clout.⁶⁹

Chapter Outline

This dissertation emphasizes change over time in order to demonstrate how the Methodist Building became an important site through which leaders of the Board constructed and practiced their religious identity. This structure juxtaposes important historical developments in the history of the organization and the construction of a new building or room in order to understand how the Board and other observers projected religious meanings onto the Methodist Building. The chapter organization will move forward roughly chronologically (with some overlap), with each chapter analyzing a different part of the Methodist Building. The dissertation focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on the period between 1916 to 1936 for several interrelated, critical reasons. The most obvious of which is that this period encompasses the entire timeline of design, fundraising, construction, expansion, and institutional preservation of the Methodist Building. This period also follows Wilson's tenure as General Secretary of the Board. Wilson, with his belief that Prohibition would usher in a golden era of Christian involvement in government, and his firm commitment to Methodist leadership in public life, developed and advocated for the construction of the Methodist Building. Finally, during this period, the predominately white Northern and Southern branches of American Methodism, the MEC and MECS, engaged in serious negotiation about reuniting to form a national church.⁷⁰

The first chapter discusses the creation of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals from the former Church Temperance Society and the MEC's directive for the new

⁶⁹ "America's Changing Religious Landscape," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, May 12, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

⁷⁰ Morris L. Davis, *The Methodist Unification Christianity and the Politics of the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

Board to relocate to Washington, D.C. It introduces the reader to the religious and racial history of Washington, D.C., including the growing presence of Jim Crow segregation and the boom in construction of both civic and religious buildings in the nation's segregated capital. Reading Board archives, the Board's newsletter, *The Voice of Temperance*, city directories, and urban real estate maps, the chapter combines institutional and urban history methods to argue that the Board perceived Catholic buildings outnumbering Protestant buildings in Washington, and hoped that a Methodist building on Capitol Hill would counter the Catholic influence in the capital. Studying the purchase of the property, and early plans for the proposed building, this chapter illustrates that the building was designed to embody the Board's public Protestantism by serving as a monument to the Protestant achievement of national Prohibition.

The first chapter discusses the Board's hopes and ambitions for the empty lot; the second chapter explore the religious meanings the Board invested in the new Methodist Building itself. Examining the public ceremonies and the interior spaces of the Methodist Building, this chapter provides a thick description of the Board's new structure on Capitol Hill. By studying the performative public ceremonies, such as the cornerstone laying in 1923, and the building dedication service in 1924, this chapter argues that the Board understood the Methodist Building as a platform for a public Protestantism that would reform the nation. A material culture analysis of the interior spaces of the Methodist Building enables me to argue that the Board fashioned the Methodist Building after the Victorian Christian home space, reflecting a normative whiteness and allowing Wilson's wife, Maude Aiken Wilson, to exercise oversight over the decor and screening of rental applicants. The chapter concludes with the dedication of Simpson Memorial Chapel in 1929, a space that united the two themes of ascribing religious significance to the

Methodist Building. The Chapel, which was dedicated in honor of Bishop Matthew Simpson and Ellen Verner Simpson, blended the themes of public Protestantism and the Christian home.

Chapter three pivots from what messages the Board sought to convey with its Methodist Building to how others perceived the Capitol Hill structure. Using journalistic and Congressional documents, this chapter examines the 1929 to 1931 controversy over whether the Methodist Building was or was not a “church lobby” as a lens into various stakeholders’ beliefs about the proper relationship between Protestantism and politics. Faced with criticism of its enterprise and threats from Congress about a federal government takeover of its property, the Board worked to refute its critics by expanding its existing building. This chapter argues that the addition of the apartment annex, which opened in late 1931, represented a defiant commitment to its mission to be in Washington, D.C., yet the apartments also show the beginning of a gradual softening of the Board’s public Protestantism. As the demise of Prohibition looked more imminent, the organization began to deemphasize its assertive Protestant identity.

The Board survived the ignominy of public scrutiny and a Congressional investigation, and endured the severe financial hardships of the Great Depression, but the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 represented an existential threat to its identity as an organization. Chapter four examines how a proposal to restructure the Board after repeal intersected with conversations about the MEC’s proposed merger with the MECS. Using Wilson’s manuscripts and Board archives, this chapter argues that Wilson intentionally inserted the Methodist Building into the merger discussion in order to claim that the Methodist Building needed to be the site for the new national church. Wilson leveraged the heavily indebted Methodist Building in an effort to unify Methodists across the country to support his vision of a new national church that embraced

temperance reform and a public presence in Washington. His successful fundraising efforts laid the groundwork for the Methodist Building's endowment.

The epilogue flashes forward to the recent past, the time of Tooley's complaints about the misdirection of the Methodist Building. Tooley and his group, UM Action, alleged that GBCS as the successor board had misused funds from the Methodist Building Endowment exclusively allocated for temperance. Using evidence from a 2008 to 2010 legal dispute, I argue that both theological liberals and theological conservatives attempted to use the Methodist Building to convey stories about the transformations in twentieth-century American Methodism. While theological liberals celebrated the Methodist Building as a center for liberal Protestant values of diversity and social justice, theological conservatives lambasted it as the site of a "liberal lobby." In so doing, the epilogue uses the recent legal dispute to summarize the central claim of this dissertation: that the Methodist Building has been a contested site where Methodists fought over the role of Methodism and Protestantism in American public life.

Chapter One: “The Bone-Dry Battle Monument:” The National Ambitions of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C., 1916-1920

Introduction

At a convention center in Saratoga Springs, New York, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) changed the name of the Church Temperance Society and revised its constitution in May 1916. The General Conference, which met every four years to revise the MEC’s book of church law, called the *Book of Discipline*, changed the name to the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals. The name change elevated the organization to the status of other boards in the MEC, such as the Home Missions Board.¹ In addition to the name change, the General Conference also relocated the organization from Topeka, Kansas to Washington, D.C. “The change is a good one, precipitating the true character of the Society so that it may be understood at a glance by readers as well as Methodists,” wrote Deets Pickett, the Board’s Research Secretary and editor of the *Voice of Temperance*, the organization’s monthly newsletter sent free-of-charge to all MEC ministers.² Next to Pickett’s article summarizing the 1916 General Conference was a drawing of the continental United States

¹ The 1916 MEC *Discipline* sets an entire section apart for the constitutions and responsibilities of Boards. In the MEC, a “Board” was programmatic agency that served the entire denomination. In addition to Temperance, other boards in the MEC included Education, Foreign Missions, Home Missions, Finance, Women’s Home and Foreign Missions, and the Book Concern. The *General Secretary*, elected for four-year terms by the board of managers, served as the highest-ranking staff member of a board. The *board of managers*, comprised of an equal number of laymen and ministers, met annually to oversee the governance of the Board, addressing personnel, financial, and educational matters. The *Book of Discipline* also mandated that Bishop serve as President of a Board.

² Deets Pickett joined the Board (then the Church Temperance Society) as the Research Secretary in 1913 and stayed in that role until 1954, where he founded, edited, and wrote for the Board’s periodical the *Voice*. Joseph Land Allen, “The Methodist Board of Temperance as an Instrument of Church Policy” (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1957), 61. Carl F. Price, ed., “Pickett, Rev. Elbert Deets,” *Who’s Who in American Methodism* (New York: E. B. Treat & Co.), 171.

with a gigantic arrow stretching over the states. Printed inside the outline of the arrow was the phrase “Straight to Washington,” and the arrow’s termination pointed directly at the Nation’s Capital.³



Figure 1.1: “About August 1st We Move to the National Capital,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, June 1916. From Gale, *Nineteenth Century US Newspapers (database)*. © Gale, a part of Cengage, Inc. Reproduced by permission.

The image and the *Voice* article not only summarized the organization’s two major changes coming out of the 1916 MEC General Conference, it also implied a connection between the two. And indeed, when the changes to the constitution were presented, the General Conference first debated the Washington location, and after voting to move the organization to

³ Deets Pickett, “What They Did: General Conference Set a High Mark in Its Temperance Utterances and Doings,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, June 1916.

the Capital, then immediately changed its name. The chair summarized the implications of this to the General Conference: “You have enlarged the duty of this Society by adding to your former name the extra title, ‘Prohibition and Public Morals.’”⁴ Rev. Dr. Clarence True Wilson, the MEC minister who served as the chief executive, called a General Secretary, of the Church Temperance Society since 1910, described the shift in geographic location, along with the name change, and an increase in annual funding as “widening its [the Board’s] scope.”⁵ Wilson, who grew up not far from Washington in Delaware, would be returning to the Mid-Atlantic region after a peripatetic career in the MEC including as a student in southern California, a parish minister in Portland, Oregon, and then as General Secretary for the Temperance Society in Chicago and Topeka.⁶

The history of institution building in early twentieth-century mainline Protestantism and Methodism remains particularly under-studied. Scholars of Methodism tend to label the period of Methodist urban institution building as a period of decadence and decline from the earlier, more lively and mobile days of the frontier and itinerant preachers, implicitly or explicitly constructing a declension thesis; early twentieth-century Methodist studies tend to concentrate on theological movements like the social gospel, or reunion between the Northern and Southern churches. Recent studies on mainline Protestantism, which have grown of late, reevaluate earlier assumptions that this period was a “religious depression,” showing vitality and creativity among

⁴ H.R. Wedderspoon, “Reports of the Committee on Temperance,” *Daily Christian Advocate* XVIII, no. 24 (May 27, 1916): 460–61.

⁵ Wilson, Clarence True, “Some Things the General Conference Did and Did Not Do” c. 1916, Correspondence, 1916-1928, Clarence True Wilson Collection, Methodist Collection - Drew University, Madison, New Jersey (hereafter cited as Wilson Collection).

⁶ Robert Dean McNeil, *Valiant for Truth: Clarence True Wilson and Prohibition: A Story of Prohibition and One of Its Leading Advocates* (Portland, Ore.: Oregonians Concerned about Addiction Problems, 1992).

mainline publications and thinkers. However, little effort has been made to understand what physical buildings reveal about the establishment identity of mainline Protestantism. This chapter explores the era of mainline institution building, revealing how buildings were an important way to express their theology and way to claim their identity as the Protestant establishment.⁷

Wilson and the Board's Public Protestantism

The Temperance Society's institutional changes and geographic relocation placed the new Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals among what historian Gaines Foster described as the "Christian lobby." According to Foster, the Christian lobby represented a loose alliance of Protestant reform organizations with institutional presences in Washington that shared the goals of promoting the adoption of moral reform legislation, such as outlawing or restricting Sunday mail, divorce, abortion, polygamy and alcohol consumption. The Christian lobby tried to persuade the federal government to conform to Protestant Christian morality, but the organizations derived their political capital from mobilizing their national networks of grassroots Protestant Christian members in support of their cause. Organizations that were a part of the Christian lobby—including the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the American Sabbath Union, and the Anti-Saloon League—brought Protestants into politics with the expressed goal of Christianizing the government.⁸ As outlined in the introduction, I define the aspiration for state

⁷ Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger, eds., *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001); John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984); Robert T. Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935," *Church History* 29, no. 1 (March 1960): 3-16; Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸ Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1-7.

recognition of Protestant cultural authority, and the claim for right to align federal law with Protestant morality because of an explicit Protestant identity as “public Protestantism.” With its relocation to Washington and name change, the MEC Board became a part of the Christian lobby and articulated its own particular expression of public Protestantism, as this chapter will demonstrate. Previously, when the Board was the Topeka, Kansas-based Temperance Society, the organization promoted temperance education within the MEC denomination, encouraging congregations and young peoples’ groups to organize temperance associations in their own churches and commit to abstaining from alcoholic beverages. As a denominational temperance education organization, this form of grassroots activism intended to demonstrate and build popular support for legislative reform.⁹ The Temperance Society gradually became interested in statewide prohibition campaigns, mainly in the Western and Midwestern United States.¹⁰ Only in late 1915 did the Society’s attention shift toward national politics and Washington, D.C., when the Prohibition debate had long been underway. Larger, more influential, national organizations that supported prohibition shifted their attention to the federal level in 1913, when the leadership of the Anti-Saloon League decided to advocate for a Constitutional amendment on Prohibition.¹¹

Wilson, who was an ardent temperance and prohibition activist, held national ambitions for both the prohibition of alcohol and, like other white male ministers in his denomination, for the national prominence and influence of the MEC. Though his photos suggested he was

⁹ Clarence True Wilson, “From the General Secretary to You!,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, April 1915.

¹⁰ “What the Methodist Temperance Society Is Doing,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, March 1914; “Pacific Coast Campaign,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, June 1914.

¹¹ On the transition from local and state prohibition campaigns to a nationwide constitutional amendment, see: K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 115–159.

reserved, sporting a professorial goatee, wire-rimmed glasses, and receding hairline, Wilson had a penchant for flamboyant, explosive rhetoric about the urgency of national prohibition. He attributed the source of many of American social problems to alcohol consumption, including premature deaths, domestic violence, and urban disorder. Among his favorite scapegoats for alcohol consumption were immigrants and Catholics, groups that he alleged persisted in drinking, gambling, and smoking.¹² As a Civil War history buff, he believed obsessively that John Wilkes Booth still lived, and Wilson's theological outlook and unapologetic endorsement of public Protestantism's role in American life reflected an atavistic embrace of Protestant leadership in the antebellum temperance and abolitionist movements.¹³

Wilson's embrace of public Protestantism emerged from his belief that Christianity inspired American democratic institutions and values. In his book *The Divine Right of Democracy*, a series of eclectic essays in which he expounded his thoughts about democracy, American history, political philosophy, and Christian theology, Wilson traced the precedents for American democratic government to the Hebrew Bible and the teachings of Jesus, not the Greeks or Romans. He argued that Hebrew Bible stories, like Jacob receiving the blessing over his brother Esau, or David becoming king over his older brothers, established a tradition of selection based upon merit, not birth order. The Ten Commandments, he explained, formed the foundation for American law, including Sabbath observance, which Wilson claimed the Constitution endorsed in Article II, when the document exempted Sundays from the number of days a president has to veto a bill.¹⁴ In the New Testament, Wilson described Jesus as "the creator and

¹² Wilson, *Dry or Die*.

¹³ C. Wyatt Evans, "Of Mummies and Methodism: Reverend Clarence True Wilson and the Legend of John Wilkes Booth," *Journal of Southern Religion* 5 (2002).

¹⁴ Clarence True Wilson, *The Divine Right of Democracy; Or, The People's Right to Rule: A Study in Citizenship*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1922), 22-24, 37, 72.

the architect of democracy. It would not be difficult to show that the New Testament is a handbook of democratic principles,” he rationalized.¹⁵ He cited Jesus’ commandment to love your neighbor as yourself as a critical influence on the statement in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal.” By making such arguments, Wilson did not merely draw biblical allusions to American democracy, constructing a sort of American civil religion; rather, he argued that the framers read the stories of the Bible and used them as examples to model the democratic structures outlined in the U.S. Constitution. “It is easy to see what influenced the framers of our Constitution to make our form of government, especially when we consider that ours was the first government that was ever formed by Bible-reading men,” Wilson wrote. The claim Wilson makes is not one of correlation but causation.¹⁶

Wilson also made clear that the Christianity that inspired American democratic institutions was indubitably English-speaking Protestantism. He argued it was the American tradition of religious liberty, Bible reading, and local democracy which began in the British North American colonies that distinguished the successful American transition to democratic government from its French counterpart. Because France was a majority Catholic nation, Wilson explained that it did not have these same traditions, enabling the country to return to absolute monarchy and military rule under Napoleon.¹⁷ By contrast, English-speaking Protestants in search of religious and civil liberty settled the British North American colonies, which therefore fostered a tradition of democratic political culture and establish the right of self-government in the future United States.¹⁸ Because of the significant influence Protestantism exercised on the

¹⁵ Ibid., 48-49.

¹⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷ Ibid., 40-41.

¹⁸ Ibid., 42-44, 77-81.

development of American democratic institutions, Wilson called the United States a “Christian nation.” But this did not mean a theocracy, installing Christians in elected office, or even American civil religion. According to Wilson, the U.S. was a Christian nation because the Bible inspired its founding documents and institutions, and because Protestant Christians established a tradition of religious and civil liberties. Because of the Protestant Christian influence on American democracy, Wilson explained:

We do not seek to unite the church with the state, nor to make the church domineer the state, nor to let the state oppress the church, but we will help to see that the church aids the state in maintaining good government, and thus to furnish a fulcrum of uplift for the moral betterment of mankind.¹⁹

Protestant Christians have a right and an obligation to assist the state in shaping morality and nurturing democratic participation as Protestant, Wilson argued, because of the historic contributions Protestantism made to American democracy, the concept I refer to throughout this dissertation as public Protestantism.

As General Secretary of the Board, Wilson shaped an organization that embraced his theology of moral reform, and expressed his particular public Protestantism through the Board’s new Washington, D.C. building. Using the Board’s move to Washington, D.C. and its first few years in the nation’s capital, this chapter argues that the two appended titles of “Prohibition and Public Morals” motivated Wilson and the Board to construct a building on Capitol Hill. Because the 1916 General Conference had “enlarged the duty” of the Board to include “Prohibition and Public Morals” along with its existing commitment to temperance, the Board planned to construct a building that would serve as the home for the MEC to exercise national influence on social and political issues facing the nation and the world. From Wilson’s earliest inception of

¹⁹ Wilson, *Divine Right of Democracy*, 98.

the new building, the structure would honor the accomplishments of legalized prohibition. The building would also seek to go beyond that reform movement in its scope, honoring the Board's expanded mission as the Board of "public morals." Prohibition was the foundation on which the Board hoped to construct a building dedicated to furthering its mission of public Protestantism by providing a centrally located space in the nation's capital where the Board could advocate for Protestant morality in federal law.²⁰

National Methodism in the Nation's Capital

The MEC General Conference's decision to expand the scope and move the Board to Washington reflected the church's aspirations for national influence. As one of the largest and wealthiest denominations in the U.S. at the time, the MEC yearned to exert its clout on a national level and promote its brand of public Protestantism. As further indication of this ambition, the 1916 General Conference also authorized a commission on unification with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS). As Morris L. Davis has illustrated, the goal of reunion between the two branches in white Methodism was to build a stronger national church.²¹ While prospects for reunification started at the 1916 General Conference, but languished soon after, moving the newly renamed Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals to Washington was a quicker and less fraught way to ensure a Methodist presence in national affairs.

As members of the MEC were likely aware, the city of Washington, D.C. experienced a boom in construction during the first decades of the twentieth century. From its inception in the

²⁰ Wilson, "Suggested Plan for Raising the \$250,000 Needed for Purchase of Property and Erection of New Building" undated, Records of the General Welfare Division of the General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey (hereafter cited as GBCS General Welfare Division Records).

²¹ Morris L. Davis, *The Methodist Unification Christianity and the Politics of the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 4–8.

late eighteenth century, development in Washington followed highly prescribed urban plans. The city's symbolic center was the U.S. Capitol Building, from which point Washington was divided into four unequal size quadrants: Northwest, Northeast, Southeast, and Southwest. Streets north and south of the Capitol were named for a letter, ascending in the alphabet as the distance from the Capitol increased. East-west streets were organized in ordinal numbers, also increasing in distance. The two met to form a neatly organized urban grid over the city. Broad, diagonal streets, called avenues, were named for the original thirteen states and bisected the grid at designated points. The continued desire to plan Washington extended into the twentieth century, when the 1901 MacMillan Commission, laid out a Beaux Arts style urban plan for the Nation's Capital, including the plan for what is now the National Mall. Following the Commission plan, construction across the city ballooned. Cranes and construction workers likely filled Washington in the years before and during the Board's move to the city. Washington's new central railroad terminal, Union Station opened in 1907. Several blocks south, in the southeast section of Capitol Hill, the House Office Building opened that same year, providing offices to Congressmen. The following year, 1908, the Senate Office Building opened just a few blocks away from Union Station. And in 1914, a new central Post Office Building opened just a block away.²²

The Washington construction boom did not just apply to federal buildings. New religious institutions also cropped up in the capital during this period. Most notably, then-President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone for the Episcopal Cathedral of Saint Peter and Saint

²² James M. Goode, *Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003); Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Capital City, 1879-1950*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 187–206; Frederick Albert Gutheim et al., *Worthy of the Nation: Washington, DC, from L'Enfant to the National Capital Planning Commission* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 141–208.

Paul in 1907. More commonly known as the National Cathedral, the laying of the cornerstone was the result of an 1893 Act of Congress that authorized the construction of the church. A century earlier, Washington, D.C.'s first city planner, Pierre L'Enfant, dreamed of a national church in the federal city in his 1791 plan. But the city's earliest architects demurred, citing the First Amendment's separation of church and state. Yet in the early twentieth century, L'Enfant's dream for a national church in Washington City, as he called it, would materialize, although in a slightly different place than he originally intended, atop one of the highest points in Washington, overlooking the rest of the city.²³ But the religious building boom extended beyond projects authorized by Congress and those aligned with one of the former established churches in North America. North of the White House, new church buildings began opening along 16th Street NW, including one belonging to the MEC, Foundry ME Church, at P and 16th Streets in 1902.²⁴

The ongoing construction boom in Washington, D.C. likely explains why the MEC General Conference felt an urgent need to move to the capital city. The urgency of the situation was highlighted by the fact that the Methodists who submitted resolutions about moving the then-Church Temperance Society came from conferences of the MEC closest to Washington: the Baltimore Conference, whose boundaries included the city of Washington, D.C., and the nearby New Jersey Conference.²⁵ At the time of submitting these resolutions to General Conference,

²³ Scott W. Berg, *Grand Avenues: The Story of the French Visionary Who Designed Washington, D.C.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 78–103; Washington Cathedral and National Cathedral Association, *A Guide to Washington Cathedral*. (Washington, D.C: National Cathedral Association, 1965).

²⁴ Goode, *Capital Losses*, 240–241.

²⁵ Henry P. Bennett and New Jersey Conference, "Memorial to the General Conference on the Location of the Temperance Society" May 5, 1916; W.R. Wedderspoon, Baltimore Conference, and W.L. McDowell, "Memorial on the Location of the Temperance Society" May 5, 1916, Records of the General Conference, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey (hereafter cited as General Conference Records).

neither of the unidentified individuals sponsoring them were among the managers of the Church Temperance Society, meaning that they did not play a role in the governance of the organization. Furthermore, the Society's most immediate meeting before General Conference, held in Topeka in 1915, mentioned nothing about a potential move to Washington, D.C., suggesting that there was little coordination with the organization itself. The resolutions likely were inspired by a sense of urgency about laying Methodist claims to space in a rapidly changing capital city.²⁶

Both conferences' resolutions offered rationales of the MEC exercising influence in national affairs and the strategic importance of Washington, D.C. in the ongoing fight for alcohol prohibition. The Baltimore Conference resolution justified the relocation of the Temperance organization by emphasizing the need for its influence in national public life. "The influence of the society is needed in the nation's capital, where many bills are pending upon which our representatives need to hear officially from the Methodist Episcopal Church," the resolution stated. The New Jersey resolution adopted a similar rationale, calling for "the voice of the Methodist Church should be added to the appeals now pending in the nation's capital." Both added that Washington was the optimal location, as the Protestant-led fight for legalized Prohibition was moving from the states to the U.S. Congress. The Baltimore Conference stated that "the battlefield for prohibition is going to be on the Atlantic coast and center in Washington," having already achieved successes out West and in the Church Temperance Society's current home state of Kansas. Using the Board's former name, the resolutions suggest

²⁶ Annual meeting minutes, October 20, 1915, Minutes, 1912-1933, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey (hereafter cited as GBCS Administrative Records).

no coordination with the effort to change the Society's name, although each embrace an identity for the organization as an arbiter of morality in national public affairs.²⁷

When the proposed resolution came to the floor of the General Conference, which now included the name change, the only opposition came from Kansas Methodists who wanted to keep the organization in their home state. Other than the Kansas delegate, W.C. Hanson's reluctance to relinquish the privilege of hosting the organization, no opposition to the move was voiced, and none along the grounds of pursuing greater Methodist influence in national affairs. Hanson's amendment to keep the organization in Topeka failed, as the vast majority of delegates approved the rationale to move to Washington. William R. Wedderspoon, a delegate from the Baltimore Conference and pastor at Foundry ME Church, who signed the resolution first calling for the organization's move to Washington, spoke in opposition to Hanson's Topeka amendment.²⁸ Washington was the home for many other Protestant reform institutions, or Christian lobbies, Wedderspoon noted, allowing for the Board to partner with the efforts of other organizations to secure prohibition. Furthermore, Wedderspoon argued that the value of face-to-face meetings with legislators could not be underestimated, allowing opportunities for the Board to testify at congressional hearings. Yet, Wedderspoon's final reason for supporting the Washington location was less pragmatic but appealed to the national ambitions of the MEC. "We are making a great fight in the city of Washington to bring prohibition to pass," he said. "If the

²⁷ Bennett and New Jersey Conference, "Memorial to the General Conference on the Location of the Temperance Society"; Wedderspoon et al., "Memorial on the Location of the Temperance Society," General Conference Records.

²⁸ *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia, 1914* (R.L. Polk and Co.: Washington, D.C., 1914), 1356.

Church Temperance Society can help us in Washington, our great national center, and bring about that great national reform, its effect will go over the whole nation.”²⁹

Wedderspoon assuaged any final reservations by sharing that a place for the organization had already been arranged. Neither of the resolutions that called for the organization to come to Washington had specified where in the city the Board would be located once it moved. In his speech in favor of the move to Washington, Wedderspoon did not want price or space to hinder delegates from supporting this move, so he shared that he had personally negotiated with the International Reform Bureau had already offered to rent eight rooms to the Board for \$35 per month.³⁰ The General Conference voted for the move to Washington, and then immediately followed by changing and expanding the name. Two days later, on May 27, the new Board held an impromptu organizational meeting in a convention hall at the General Conference. At that meeting, the recording secretary, John MacMurry, was instructed to accept Wedderspoon’s offer to move to 204 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE in the International Reform Bureau, just blocks away from the U.S. Capitol and Library of Congress.³¹ Founded in 1894, the International Reform Bureau was the brainchild of Wilbur H. Crafts, who believed that Protestant Christians needed a permanent presence in Washington, D.C. to accomplish their work as Christian lobbyists.³² According to the *Voice*, the Temperance Board’s periodical, they officially closed the Topeka office on July 1, and moved to their new location in D.C. by July 15.³³

²⁹ Wedderspoon, “Reports of the Committee on Temperance,” *Daily Christian Advocate*, 460.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Minutes of the special meeting of the Board of Managers, May 27, 1916, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

³² Foster, *Moral Reconstruction*, 110–112. Coincidentally, Crafts was raised Methodist but later served Congregationalist and Presbyterian congregations.

³³ “The New Headquarters of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, July 1916.

In order for the new Board to attain national influence in Washington, D.C., the General Conference recommended one final addition to the organization's structure, the creation of a group of advisory members. Appointed by the Bishops of the MEC, the advisory members included Congressmen, Senators, and other public officials like a federal judge and a member of President Woodrow Wilson's cabinet.³⁴ As the 1916 *Discipline* makes no reference of advisory members, this role was purely an honorary one; advisors were not formally charged with the governance of the Board as were the managers.³⁵ (The Board's managers consisted of twenty members of the MEC, all men, roughly half ministers and half laymen, from Chicago, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and various places in New Jersey.) As minutes from the annual meetings suggest, advisory members' attendance was not obligatory, as they had no formal responsibilities. At the 1916 annual meeting, held in December 1916, Congressman Addison T. Smith, Republican of Idaho, spoke about three pending bills on temperance, and "action was taken [by the managers] endorsing the bills and pledging the support of the Board in securing their passage."³⁶ Such a presentation was not the norm. The following annual meeting in December 1917, several advisory members, including Smith, sent their regrets.³⁷ However, the existence of the advisory members is indicative of the Board's aspirations for building relationships with public officials in the MEC's quest for national influence.

³⁴ Clarence True Wilson, "The New Quadrennium," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, July 1916. Special meeting minutes, May 27, 1916.

³⁵ David G. Downey, ed., *Doctrines and Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1916* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1916), § 3. The 1920 *Discipline* is the first reference to the addition of the advisory members, though no role or job description is specified.

³⁶ Minutes of the special meeting, May 25, 1916, pages 1-2; minutes of the annual meeting, December 9, 1916, page 2, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

³⁷ Minutes of the annual meeting, December 4, 1917, page 1, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

Catholics and African Americans in the Board's Washington, D.C.

In addition to Washington being the seat of the federal government, giving the MEC a voice in national public policy debates, MEC leaders believed that Washington was an ideal location for the Board's work because the city's diversity represented something of a cross section of the nation. Because public Protestantism entailed claiming the right to govern and shape national affairs, a Washington, D.C. headquarters would position the MEC at the center of American life, in between the North and the South. With an explicit Protestant identity, the MEC would claim the right to shape morality for all Americans, white Protestants, as well as African Americans and European immigrants, some of whom were Catholic or Jewish. The Baltimore resolution, unlike the New Jersey resolution, for example, bolstered its case for the Washington, D.C. It stated that Washington "is convenient to the landing places of the immigrants who come to our shores," implying that the capital was near to cities with large immigrant populations like New York or Boston. It also added that "Washington is convenient of access to the ten millions of colored people who live in the nation."³⁸ The ambitions of public Protestantism meant influencing the entire nation from the nation's capital, but that also meant locating the Board in a city was over twenty-five percent African American.³⁹

Though Wilson's understanding of a "Christian nation" included enforcing the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which were passed during the Reconstruction era and

³⁸ Charles A. Pollock, chair, "Location of Temperance Society Headquarters," *Daily Christian Advocate* XVIII, no. 19 (May 22, 1916): 362; W.R. Wedderspoon, et al., "Memorial on the Location of the Temperance Society," *General Conference Records*.

³⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Population-District of Columbia: Color or Race, Nativity, Parentage and Sex," *1920 U.S. Census Bureau: Volume 3, Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population by States*, 178, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1920/volume-3/41084484v3ch02.pdf> (accessed April 10, 2017). The 1920 U.S. Census reports African Americans as over 25 percent of the population in the District of Columbia.

ensured equal protection and voting rights for African Americans, the Board's public Protestantism often overlooked African Americans. Once in Washington, the Board's limited interaction with African Americans was consistent with the segregated structure of the MEC, as it established a segregated Colored Department for temperance education. Led by Rev. J.N.C. Coggin, the Secretary for Colored Work, it was responsible for all temperance education among African Americans in the MEC.⁴⁰ This practice mirrored that of the city's other white mainline Protestants, who aided and abetted segregation in the capital in both directly and indirectly.⁴¹ On the rare occasions that Clarence True Wilson mentioned race, he behaved like other white mainline Protestant ministers in Washington, who claimed temperance would be a remedy to racial tensions under Jim Crow segregation. In a theatrical speech in November 1916 in which he dramatically opened mail on stage, Wilson warned against the dangers of alcohol advertisements in the mail, telling the audience that a mail order for whiskey led to the rape of a young girl (whose unmentioned racial identity suggests she was white) and the lynching of a black man.⁴² Like other ministers who proclaimed from the pulpits of white mainline churches, such as Calvary Baptist Church, "We...realize that the drink is the negro's greatest curse," Wilson also advocated that African Americans adopt temperance rather than addressing the actual structural problems of racial inequality.⁴³

⁴⁰ Coggin later served as pastor of Mt. Calvary ME Church in Harlem, and died in November 1927. "Rev. Dr. Coggin, Noted Methodist Minister Dead," *New York Age*, November 19, 1927.

⁴¹ Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City; a History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 165; Kurt F. Karandy, "The Souls of White Folk: The Social Gospel and Jim Crow in Washington, D.C., 1880-1920" (BA thesis, American University, 2011).

⁴² "Big Mass Meeting in Nation's Capital," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, December 1916.

⁴³ "Talks Race Problem: Local Option Helps to Solve, Calls Drinking Negro's Curse," *Washington Post*, May 21, 1907.

The public Protestantism that Wilson and the Board adopted upon arriving in Washington was grounded in whiteness, often overlooking African Americans. The July issue of *The Voice of Temperance*, the organization's monthly newsletter, was filled with news of the Board's move to Washington, D.C. Yet the most significant sentence about the move to D.C. was found on the inside of the four-page tabloid size paper, in an unsigned paragraph-length item, which opened, "In the capital of the nation, The Board of Temperance will be like a city set upon a hill." Likewise, the Board described its physical space in idyllic terms, evoking the racialized white city. Located at 204 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, the International Reform Bureau's building was a simple three-story row home covered with ivy and bushes in the heart of the Capitol Hill neighborhood. In a July 1916 photo of the building that appeared in the *Voice*, The Library of Congress, (now the Jefferson Building) appears in the left foreground.⁴⁴ In another publication shared with the entire MEC, the Board described the location as an ideal one, sitting in the shadow of the Library of Congress and two blocks away from the U.S. Capitol Building. The International Reform Building, the *Yearbook* explained, once was home to the Supreme Court after the British burned the Capitol in 1814. "They are located on one of the most beautiful avenues of the city," the *Methodist Yearbook* rhapsodized of Pennsylvania Avenue, SE.⁴⁵ Among the buildings surrounding the International Reform Bureau at Pennsylvania Avenue and its cross streets, were hotels, restaurants, and row homes catering to the Capitol Hill clientele. The neighborhood they encountered was a mix of urban residential, leisure, and government offices;

⁴⁴ "The New Headquarters of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, July 1916.

⁴⁵ "Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals," *Yearbook of the Methodist Episcopal Church* 86 (1919): 158–59. The writer hardly knew at the time how the history of the Supreme Court Building would continue to follow the Board. Within a decade of the Methodist Building's construction at First and Maryland Avenue, NE, the Supreme Court moved across the street, at one point even jeopardizing the future of the Methodist Building at that site.

the only African Americans in the neighborhood would likely have been janitors, servers, or other support staff serving these institutions; African Americans lived further to the south, across especially across the Anacostia River.⁴⁶ As then-President Woodrow Wilson segregated public services and rolled back federal civil rights protections for African Americans, Clarence True Wilson waxed about “beautiful avenues” and “a city on a hill” in Jim Crow Washington.

Because Jim Crow segregation often blinded white Protestants to black presence in Washington, D.C., Wilson and the Board devoted little attention to African Americans. Instead, the Board was more concerned with religious others in the city, and came to characterize Washington along religious fault lines of Protestant versus Catholic. In other words, the Board’s public Protestantism elided racial difference while fixating on religious difference. Though Wilson had occasionally expressed anti-Catholic sentiments before, notably contending that one reason why then-President William Howard Taft would not support a national prohibition law was because he was beholden to the Roman Catholic Church, Wilson and the Board paid little attention to Catholics before moving to Washington.⁴⁷ Yet shortly after relocating to Washington, the Board frequently compared the MEC influence in Washington to Catholic influence. By August 1917, the Board published a tally of the church affiliations of Congressmen, listing 82 “Methodists” (likely including both MEC and MECS members in their tally) to 24 Catholics. “What church embraces the largest number of Congressmen? Perhaps you might answer, ‘The Catholic.’ Wrong. The Methodists lead with a handsome margin,” boasted the *Voice*, suggesting the MEC readers might be surprised about their numerical lead.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Lindsay Silver, “‘The Nation’s Neighborhood:’ The People, Power, and Politics of Capitol Hill Since the Civil War” (PhD dissertation, Brandeis University, 2007), 65–88.

⁴⁷ Wilson, *Dry or Die*, 72.

⁴⁸ “The Church Affiliations of Congressmen,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, August 1917.

A key factor in inspiring the Board's growing anti-Catholicism in its communications likely would have been the Roman Catholic Church's small, but growing physical presence on the built environment of Washington. Further north of the Board's Capitol Hill offices, Catholics were building in the Brookland neighborhood. Catholic University, which had been in existence since 1887, became an undergraduate institution in 1904. During the 1910s, Cardinal Gibbons planned to create a cathedral called the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and with Pope Pius X's approval in 1913, plans were underway for Catholics to build a national church in Washington.⁴⁹ To Wilson and the Board, the Catholic presence in Washington, D.C. enlisted the MEC in a Manichean struggle for influence in the nation's capital. "The Roman Catholic Church omits no opportunity to place itself in evidence here and to give the impression that it is the national embodiment of religion and morality," the June 1917 issue of the *Voice* reported to MEC ministers. In the *Voice* essay, co-signed by Wilson, Research Secretary Deets Pickett and Extension Secretary Ernest Smith, Wilson believed it was urgent to counter the Catholic presence with a building of their own in order to remind Congressmen and Senators that Protestantism, not Catholicism embodied American ideals. "We yet insist that the loftiest expressions of religion and morality to be seen anywhere are found in Protestantism, and if the potencies of religion and morality are to be brought to bear upon the legislation of the nation, it should be done through Protestantism," they wrote.⁵⁰

For Wilson, Pickett, and other Board leaders, the ominous threat that they derived from Catholicism was not just motivated by the anti-Catholic sentiment that many Protestant

⁴⁹ Thomas A. Tweed, *America's Church: The National Shrine and Catholic Presence in the Nation's Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

⁵⁰ Clarence True Wilson, Deets Pickett, and Ernest Dailey Smith, "Open Letter to Methodist Pastors," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, June 1917.

prohibition advocates held. It was also derived from the surrounding neighborhood. As they travelled around Capitol Hill, they would have observed that the neighborhood was sprinkled with churches, both Catholic and various Protestant denominations, in the midst of hotels, government buildings, and residential dwellings. Just around the corner from the building was the Lutheran Church of the Reformation; two blocks further was Metropolitan Presbyterian Church. In a city with fifty-four ME Churches (thirty-five of them white), seven ME Churches, South, and eight Methodist Protestant Churches, there were only twenty-seven Catholic Churches in Washington, D.C. the year the Board relocated, though they were concentrated in the Northeast quadrant of the city.⁵¹ These Capitol Hill Protestant churches were constructed in gothic revival style, which, as historian Ryan K. Smith has demonstrated, Protestants adopted in the mid- and late-nineteenth-century amidst Protestant anxieties of competition with Catholics. The neighborhood the Board inhabited therefore bore signs of anxiety over Catholics in stone.⁵² While mainline Protestant churches outnumbered Catholic Churches in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, for a MEC minister who had recently arrived on the East Coast from Topeka, Kansas the mere phenomenon that several were within walking distance was likely a shock. Other Protestant social reform organizations promoting temperance and prohibition remained a bit farther away from the Board. Both the WCTU headquarters and the Anti-Saloon League were in the city's Northwest quadrant, nearer to the National Mall and downtown Washington, located at 522 6th Street NW and in the Bliss Building at 35 B Street, NW respectively. The ecumenical organization, the Federal Council of Churches, was a few blocks west, in the Woodward building

⁵¹ *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia, 1916*, (R.L. Polk and Co.: Washington, D.C., 1916); St. Joseph's Church, Box 1, Churches – Catholic, Willard R. Ross Postcard Collection, DC Public Library, Special Collections.

⁵² Ryan K. Smith, *Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses Anti-Catholicism and American Church Designs in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

at H and 15th Streets NW.⁵³ Combined with the fact that plans were underway for the constructing the National Shrine at Catholic University in the nearby Brookland neighborhood, the religious topography the Board constructed isolated them in the midst of a Catholic capital city. Though Wilson never directly mentioned Josiah Strong's *Our Country*, he shared Strong's views that the American city had become morally decadent under Catholic influence.⁵⁴

Just as the Board expressed anxieties about Catholic presence in the city, the Board also was concerned over the profusion of liquor stores a few blocks away. The Capitol Hill that Wilson and the Board inhabited was not only speckled with steeples, but also filled with institutions that served and sold alcohol, as would be expected in any early twentieth-century urban neighborhood that was mixed with government, business, residential, and leisure establishments. Because the neighborhood was within walking distance to the Capitol, it was an attractive spot for many travelers to stay for business. The hotels in the neighborhood had bars or restaurants that served alcohol. H Street, NE (not far from their future lot at First Street and Maryland Avenue NE) was home to several billiards, saloons, and cigar manufacturers. Closer to the International Reform Building were two cigar manufacturers along 8th Street, SE. A wholesale liquor store was across the street at less than a block away, at 227 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, and a retail liquor store at 343 1st St SE, just a few blocks away. Further uptown, in the Northeast quadrant were a few breweries, including Washington Brewery at 5th and F Streets. "Demon rum" in the world of the Board, who had just arrived from "bone-dry" Kansas, was not

⁵³ George William Baist, "Baist's Real Estate Atlas Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia" (Washington, D.C., 1915).

⁵⁴ Tweed, *America's Church*, 22–58; Robert A. Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1–78; Josiah Strong, *Our Country* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963).

some abstract concept. It was in their own neighborhood, at the nearby bar, hotel, restaurant, billiard hall, and saloon. It was in the neighborhood they moved into.⁵⁵

The actual religious geography of Capitol Hill stood at odds with the MEC's national ambitions for influence that first sent the Board to the capital. At the Board's first annual meeting in Washington, D.C., held in December 1916, Wilson told the managers, who governed the Board, that it was necessary that the Board construct a building in the city. Wilson described the move to Topeka four years earlier as "strategic" and "providential," and told the managers he understood the 1916 General Conference's move and name change to also be fulfilling a mission. "Our church must have a voice in the representation of all questions of public morals upon which Methodism takes a stand," said Wilson. Because the General Conference sent the Board to Washington to bolster the MEC's influence in national affairs, Wilson explained to the managers the imperative that they have their own building. The Board's move to Washington was permanent, Wilson suggested, and he told the managers that the rented space in the International Reform Bureau was amenable only "until such time as we were able to arrange for a permanent home for our Board, which will be needed here to watch legislation and the cross-currents influencing administration, as long as there is a nation." The building would become the Methodist center to promote MEC "public morals" in the U.S. for perpetuity. "Other organizations have powerful lobbies here to promote their interests, why should not Methodism maintain such to promote the welfare of the people and the honor the flag?" Wilson said, alluding to the Catholic presence he thought overwhelmed Washington. The building he

⁵⁵ *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia, 1917* (R.L. Polk and Co.: Washington, D.C., 1917), 1711–1720, 1842–1847, 1869–1870.

envisioned for the Board would both concretize the MEC's mission in the capital, and become a primary method to compete with Catholic influence in public life.⁵⁶

Because Wilson outlined the Board's mission in this manner, the act of incorporation as a legal entity and the ownership of property became critical forms of religious significance for the Board. After Wilson's address, the managers adopted a motion to empower Wilson and the executive committee to act on "all matters relating to a new building." The managers also named a group of five individuals living in the District of Columbia authorized to secure legal incorporation for the Board in D.C.⁵⁷ Signed by Wilson, Bishop William F. McDowell who was President of the Board as well as Bishop of the Baltimore Conference, Rev. John MacMurray, and two laymen, John C. Letts, William T. Galliher, and on April 27, 1917, the certificate of incorporation created the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals as a legal entity in the District of Columbia, and authorized the organization to hold property.⁵⁸ They used this privilege right away, as that month the Board made plans to purchase a vacant 11,403 square foot lot at First Street and Maryland Avenue, NE, for \$26,781.75, with the sale finalized by June

⁵⁶ Clarence True Wilson, "Report of the General Secretary to the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals," December 9, 1916, Reports: General Secretary's Annual Reports/ Mrs. Wilson's annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection.

⁵⁷ Minutes of the annual meeting, December 9, 1916, pages 2-3, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁵⁸ "Certificate of Incorporation of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals of the Methodist Episcopal Church," May 23, 1917, Certificates of Incorporation, GBCS General Welfare Division Records. William Fraser McDowell was born in Ohio in 1858, and after serving as the chancellor at Denver University, became a bishop in 1904. He served twelve years in the Chicago area, where he first met and worked with Wilson and Pickett on the Church Temperance Society. The Board's move to Washington in 1916 coincided with McDowell's move to the area, where he became the bishop of that region until his retirement in 1932. After his retirement, he continued to be influential in the MEC, helping to lead the movement for reunion (see chapter four). "Bishop M'Dowell, Methodist Leader: Head of Washington Area of His Church 16 Years—Dies of Heart Attack at 79," *New York Times*, April 27, 1937.

1917.⁵⁹ The lot offered an unobstructed view of the U.S. Capitol Building across the street, and sat diagonal to the Senate Office Building. Union Station was five blocks away. Nearby were several Methodist churches: Waugh ME Church was at 3rd and A Streets NE, three blocks from the lot. An ME Church, South (MECS) sat at 7th Street and A NE, and several Methodist Protestant Churches at 8th and H Street NE. Two black ME churches, referred in the city directory as “ME churches, Colored,” were at 14th Street and B and C Streets NE, a bit further away. The area was not exactly devoid of Methodist institution as Wilson had implied, but St. Joseph’s Catholic Church stood at 2nd and C Streets NE, just a few blocks, possibly in the line of sight from their newly purchased lot.⁶⁰

A National Fundraising Plan for the MEC’s National Building

In order to claim the lot as Methodist, the Board understood that this entailed inspiring the participation of the whole MEC denomination. Almost immediately after the property purchase, the Board appealed to the national ambitions of the MEC in order to motivate MEC readers to donate to the plans for the proposed building. In the May 1917 issue of *The Voice*, the first page of the newsletter featured a map of Washington with a circle around the lot they purchased. The only other buildings on the illustrated black-and-white map are monuments and government buildings, highlighting how central their new property would be to all the other influential centers of power in Washington. Only federal buildings and monuments appear on the map, elevating the new MEC building to the stature of these federal structures. In a city whose

⁵⁹ Minutes of the joint meeting of the executive and finance committees, April 24, 1917, pages 92-93; minutes of the special meeting, June 12, 1917, pages 90-91, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁶⁰ Baist, “Baist’s Real Estate Atlas Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia,” Plates 14-15.

planned physical center was the U.S. Capitol, the MEC would be as close to center of power as possible, acting as the physical embodiment of public Protestantism.

Inside the issue, an article described the lot's close proximity to the Senate Office Building, the Capitol, Union Station, and the Library of Congress.⁶¹ It quoted one manager of the board, who upon seeing the lot for the first time at that April 24 meeting exclaimed, "If you had your choice of all lots in Washington, you could not surpass this for beautiful situation, convenient access to all the departments you need to reach and all around availability for your purposes and that you could get it for less than \$30,000 seems impossible." After this remark about the location, the article explained that the planned building would be six stories high, including a printing press, a bookstore, and an auditorium on one floor, the Board offices on another, other Methodist offices on yet another, and other reform organizations occupying another floor, while reserving the final two floors for apartments.⁶² Collectively, this presentation conveyed to a MEC reader of the *Voice* the central location of the property and the leadership that the MEC would exercise in Washington through their proposed building.

⁶¹ J. P. Jarvis, "The Circle and Arrow Indicate the Lot Just Purchased by the Board on Which a Building Will Be Erected to Be a Center of Temperance and Methodist Activities," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, May 1917.

⁶² "About a Methodist Center in Washington," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, May 1917.

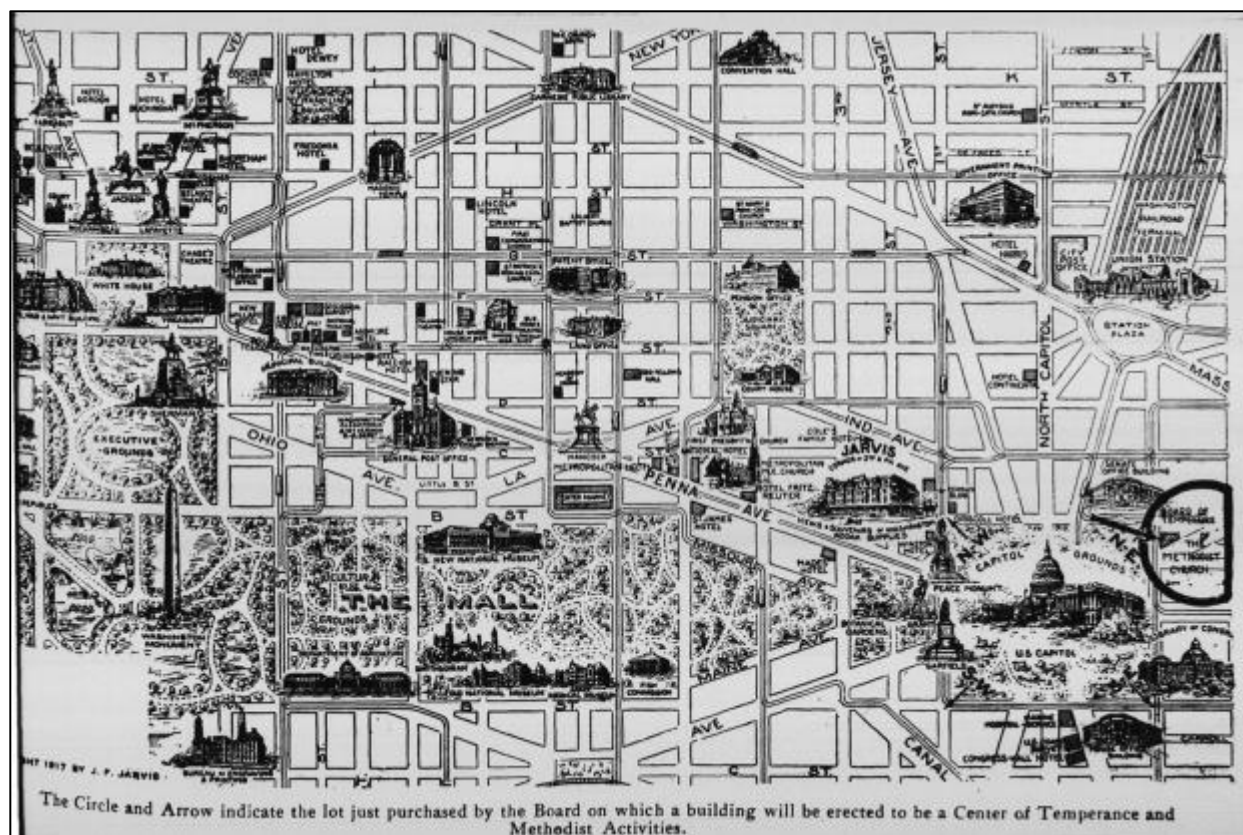


Figure 1.2: “The Circle and the Arrow Indicate the Lot Just Purchased,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, May 1917. From Gale, *Nineteenth Century US Newspapers (database)*. © Gale, a part of Cengage, Inc. Reproduced by permission.

But the Board coupled this pristine, idealized representation of the landscape with Wilson’s concerns about Catholic institutional dominance in Washington. The Board announced news of its real estate purchase in the same issue of the *Voice* that it expressed anxiety over the Catholic buildings in Washington. The intention of this rhetorical comparison was obvious: by stoking fears of Catholic dominance in Washington, the Board desired to convey the urgency within the MEC for constructing the Board’s building on Capitol Hill. “They are trying to make Washington a Catholic center and they have a right to try to do it,” wrote the *Voice* about the growing number of Catholic universities and other institutions in Washington. Wilson countered this observation by informing *Voice* readers that a Methodist Building was urgent because of the proliferation of Catholic institutions in the city. “There is not a real center of Protestant interests

in the Capital City,” it continued, positioning the issue as a Protestant-versus-Catholic architectural arms race for dominance, “**but there will be when the new building of the Methodist Church grows up. Are you going to help?**” These final words were bolded in the newsletter, emphasizing the urgency of the situation to the reader.⁶³ To MEC ministers in places such as Iowa, Tennessee, or Illinois, who had never been to Washington, such a statement may have caused panic, evoking scenes of Bible wars from the previous century.⁶⁴

In addition to inspiring MEC influence on the national stage and raising fears of Catholics, the Board also developed fundraising plans that would promote denomination-wide ownership and investment in the property. When the Board finalized the sale of the property at a special meeting of the managers on June 12, 1917, it began studying how to pay for the property and the building it planned to construct on the site.⁶⁵ In the June 1917 issue of the *Voice*, Wilson, Pickett, and Smith, appealed directly to MEC pastors for assistance in raising the funds for the new building through their churches. The fundraising pitch began with a description of their mandate to come to Washington “until all our nation’s laws and attitudes shall be elevated to light in keeping with the Christian ideals... This means we have come to Washington to stay,” emphasizing that their mission would extend beyond the passage of national prohibition. They noted the cost of the lot and the proposed building, and then asked each church to contribute some amount, however small. “We want something from every Methodist congregation in the land. In other words, we want this purchase to be made by the Methodism of the whole country,”

⁶³ “The Statesmanship of the Catholic Church,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, May 1917.

⁶⁴ Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 60–83.

⁶⁵ Special meeting minutes, June 12, 1917, pages 90–91, Minutes, 1912–1933, GBCS Administrative Records. “June 12, 1917,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, June 1917.

the Board's three leading staff members wrote.⁶⁶ In late 1917, Wilson devised a fundraising campaign called, "One Thousand Hundreds and One Hundred Thousands" aimed to solicit one thousand donations of \$100 from Methodist churches across the U.S. and one hundred donations of \$1,000 from larger donors.⁶⁷ Churches gave a range of amounts, some as small as \$1, and the Board proudly published in following issues of the *Voice* the donations sent to the Building Fund, including from the states of New York, Illinois, North and South Dakota, Pennsylvania, Montana, and Tennessee, among other places.⁶⁸ Building upon this early enthusiasm for the proposed building, the Board continued its push for denomination-wide funding at their end-of-year annual meeting when it adopted a resolution that would ask the MEC for \$300,000 for purchasing the property and erecting a building on that site.⁶⁹ In each of these efforts, national MEC support for the building not only helped the Board raise the funds for the building; it also helped to accomplish Wilson's goals of claiming the city of Washington, and by implication the nation, as a Methodist space.

Wilson's final strategy for engaging the MEC in fundraising for the new building relied on appealing to the threefold causes in the Board's name: temperance, prohibition, and public morals. In October 1917, in the same *Voice* issue that Wilson described his "One Thousand Hundreds and One Hundred Thousands" fundraising campaign, he also wrote about a building fundraising event related to the prohibition legislation pending in Congress. According to the plan, 300 Methodist ministers had pledged to raise \$100 in a special offering of thanks on the

⁶⁶ Wilson et al., "Open Letter to Methodist Pastors," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, June 1917.

⁶⁷ "One Thousand Hundreds and One Hundred Thousands," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, October 1917.

⁶⁸ "Cash Received for Our Building Not Before Reported," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, November 1916.

⁶⁹ Minutes of the annual meeting, December 4, 1917, GBCS Administrative Records.

Sunday after Congress passed the prohibition bill, connecting the Board's fundraising effort for the building with the Board's political involvement in prohibition legislation.⁷⁰ In addition, because the Board had a long history of providing temperance education within the MEC, especially in its previous iteration as the Church Temperance Society, Wilson also hoped to engage Sunday Schools and Epworth Leagues, the two organizations in the MEC for children and youth, in fundraising. Based on the target percentage he hoped these groups would raise, Wilson's goal was primarily a symbolic one. He did not expect children and youth to raise substantial amounts of funds; rather, he desired to show that young people, one of the core demographics that occupied Protestant temperance reformers' concerns, cared about promoting the mission of temperance.⁷¹

In this same document that references the MEC's historic investment in temperance, dating to the Methodist movement's origins in the late eighteenth century, Wilson also noted that the General Conference's expansion of the Board's name and scope to include "Public Morals" also compelled the necessity for the building. "In the future the Board will have quite important work to perform as at present and that is one pressing reason for a new building in the face of rapidly increasing prohibition victories." The Board's public Protestantism directly aligned with its expanded mission of "public morals." Therefore, Wilson conceived of the proposed building as honoring the MEC's legacy of temperance and Methodist social reform theology, but suggested its name ought to be more expansive, such as "The Methodist PUBLIC SERVICE Station For LIGHT and POWER."⁷² Although Wilson's fundraising plans did not elaborate on

⁷⁰ "Building Plans," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, October 1917.

⁷¹ Wilson, "Suggested Plan for raising the \$250,000 Needed for the Building," 1, GBCS General Welfare Division Records.

⁷² Ibid. 3-4. Capitalization is original.

the significance of such a name for the proposed building, such a title alluded to public utilities and services. By describing his Board's new building in this manner, Wilson compared the Board's public Protestantism to a public utility, suggesting its work to promote "public morals" was comparable to providing an essential service, like water or electricity.

The Bone-Dry Battle Monument: Prohibition and the Building's Public Protestantism

Wilson believed the success of achieving national Prohibition was to be the beginning—or the foundation—of the Board's public Protestantism in Washington. He therefore wanted the proposed building to honor the achievement of Prohibition and express the MEC's ambitions for national influence in the capital. Wilson's thoughts about temperance, prohibition and public morals in this early fundraising plan reveal much about how he understood the relationship between Prohibition and the Board's property and proposed building. The years that the Board purchased real estate and began fundraising and planning for the proposed building were also the final years of the push to legalize prohibition. Congress passed the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, legally outlawing the transportation of and sale of alcoholic products in the U.S., in December 1917. The following year, between January 1918 and 1919, states ratified the amendment, with it ultimately going into effect in January 1920.⁷³ During that same period, the Board discussed legislative developments in Prohibition side-by-side with plans for the proposed building. The issues of the *Voice* from this period are instructive examples. In the December 1917 issue, when passage of the prohibition amendment was under debate, the front page featured the architectural firm Ballinger and Perrot's preliminary drawing of the proposed building. A six-story building, the Methodist Building dominated the short row homes next to it

⁷³ K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 185–187, 205–210.

on First Street, towering above the landscape.⁷⁴ The article surrounding the drawing expressed the Board's concern that American soldiers fighting in Europe in World War I were allowed unrestricted access to alcohol. At the same annual meeting that the Board asked the MEC for funding for the new building and authorized the architectural firm to draw up plans, the Board also passed resolutions calling upon France and Britain to prohibit the sale of alcohol to U.S. soldiers.⁷⁵ The same happened in the January issue. That issue featured a state-by-state analysis of how House Members voted on the Eighteenth Amendment on one page, and the following page contained a brief paragraph item stating that the apartments in the proposed building would help ameliorate the shortage of housing for federal government employees.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ "Proposed Building to Be Erected in Washington as Headquarters of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, December 1917.

⁷⁵ "Fathers, Mothers---Fight for Our Boys Abroad," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, December 1917. Annual meeting minutes, December 4, 1917, page 3, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁷⁶ "The Government Needs the New Building," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, January 1918.

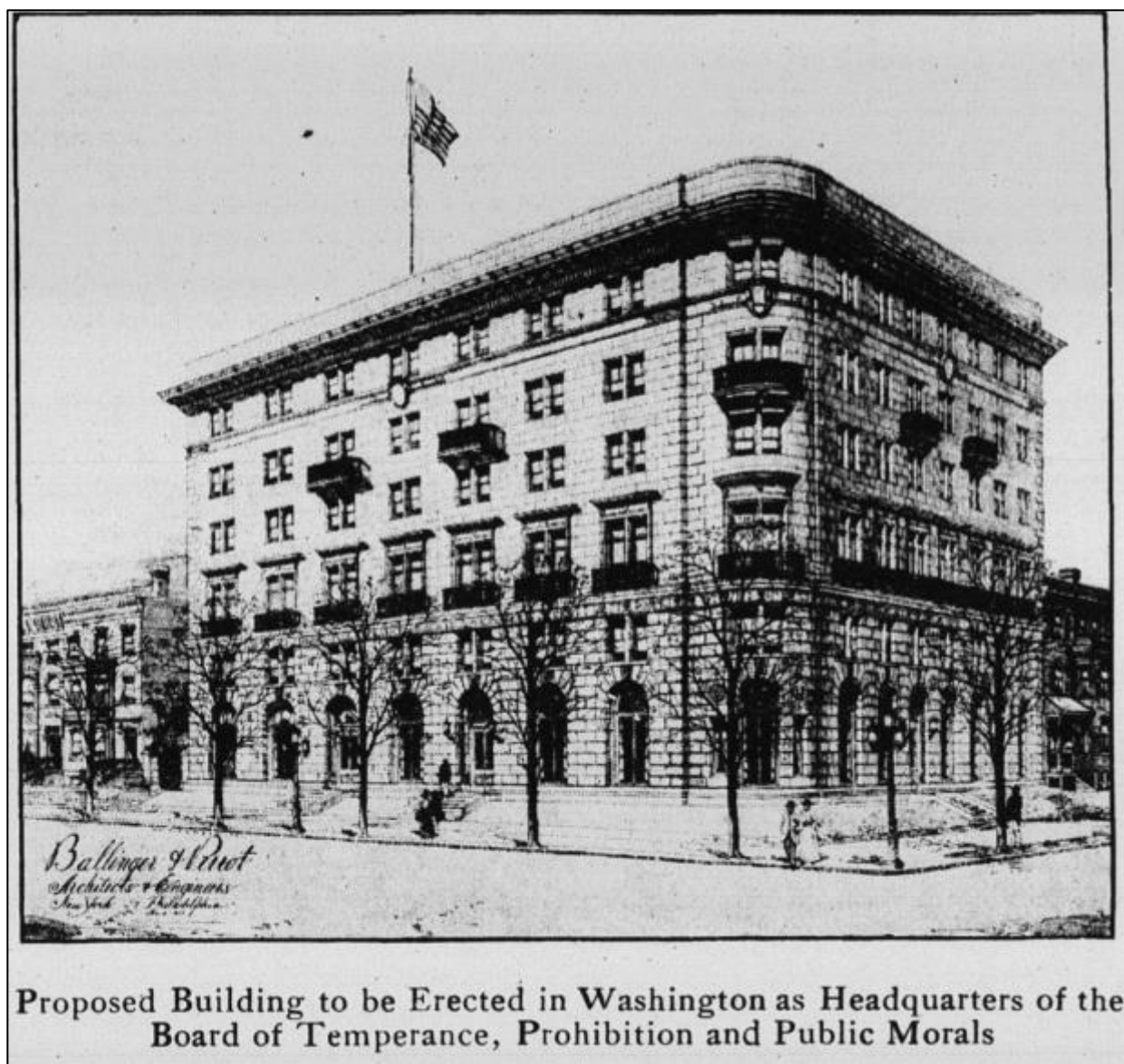


Figure 1.3 “Proposed Building to be Erected in Washington as Headquarters of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, December 1917. From Gale, *Nineteenth Century US Newspapers (database)*. © Gale, a part of Cengage, Inc. Reproduced by permission.

As the fundraising and ratification process progressed, the Board fused the two efforts into one. By February 1918, the *Voice* blended the two ongoing efforts into one when it described the building as “The Bonedry Battle and Its Monument.” According to the Board, the proposed building would celebrate of the Protestant accomplishment of national Prohibition. The article details the building progress alongside state ratification progress. It recounts recent

contributions for the building fund and a recent donation of the marble for the proposed building alongside enumerating the six states that have ratified the prohibition amendment. These dual progress reports were concluded by a fundraising plea to readers, urging them to consider donating to the new building as a means to “commemorate the Bone-Dry culmination of a century struggle and build in the Nation’s Capital.” The article implied that donating to the building fund was a way readers could support the Protestant quest for prohibition.⁷⁷ In a subsequent publication, the *MEC Yearbook*, which summarized news and happenings across the entire denomination, the Board described the proposed building as a physical, concretized symbol of the victory of securing legalized prohibition: “To fittingly commemorate the hundred-year battle with the saloon, and the monumental victory of Constitutional Prohibition, the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals wishes to erect a suitable building in the Nation’s Capital,” Pickett wrote, using monumental as a double entendre, both referring to Prohibition as a milestone and a physical structure.⁷⁸

The Board’s dual focus on legislation and real estate stood in contrast to other prohibition organizations in Washington, D.C., most notably the Anti-Saloon League (ASL). Though the MEC Board and the ASL both embraced evangelical Protestant leadership in social and moral reform and the two organizations shared a common goal of national prohibition, the Board’s relentless pursuit of a building in Washington illustrates the different methods each adopted. The ASL, which was an older organization, had been in Washington longer than the Board, but did not own a building; its strategy focused on petitioning Congress, cultivating relationships with

⁷⁷ Clarence True Wilson, “The Boney Battle and Its Monument,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, February 1918.

⁷⁸ “Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals,” *Yearbook of the Methodist Episcopal Church* 87 (1920): 194.

elected officials, and mobilizing its grassroots network of members to organize for Prohibition.⁷⁹

The Board leadership did not dismiss the importance of influencing legislation or public officials; they understood their proposed building as facilitating that goal. A building would be an effective bulwark for Prohibition and Protestant cultural authority and the MEC's national ambitions in the nation's capital—perhaps even more so, given the privileged place and attention the Board gave to its new property and building. As Pickett explained in the *Yearbook* on the eve of Prohibition going into effect:

There is no cause for which Methodists are asked to give their money which will result in larger dividends for the Kingdom of God, in the establishment of civic righteousness, in the furnishing of a medium for the activities of Methodism in the nation's capital, in signalizing the influence which God calls us to exert upon the greatest representative democracy among the nations of the earth, than the erection of such a building just fronting the doors of the Capitol of the United States.⁸⁰

For both Pickett and Wilson, national Prohibition represented the beginning of the MEC's national ambitions and moral reform influence in the capital; therefore, they envisioned the Board's building as physical monument to moral reform.

The architectural firm that designed the Board's proposed building, the Philadelphia-based Ballinger and Perrot, had plenty of previous experience designing both religious and civic buildings, like schools, hospitals, and courthouses, making it a logical choice to construct the building that would express the Board's public Protestantism. The firm had just recently completed a similar sort of religious building of offices and apartments in Philadelphia in 1915.⁸¹ The six-story gothic revival style Wesley Building (which added an additional eight stories for

⁷⁹ Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition*, 141–156; Gaines M Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 171–173.

⁸⁰ “Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals,” *Yearbook*, (1920): 194.

⁸¹ “Methodist Building Soon to Be Opened,” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, April 24, 1915.

hotel rooms above) was the new headquarters for the MEC's Board of Home Missions, a peer institution to the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals. "The church ownership suggested the Gothic motif and detail," explained the firm when it described the Wesley Building in a self-published book to showcase its work to potential clients.⁸² In addition to the firm's previous experience in designing similar types of buildings, the selection of the Ballinger and Perrot firm was a natural choice because one of its co-owners, Walter F. Ballinger was a Philadelphia Methodist and a member of the Board's managers.⁸³ As a MEC member, Ballinger endorsed Wilson's views on temperance and prohibition, but as a professional architect, he was more pragmatic when it came to business: Ballinger and Perrot designed a handful of MEC churches in the Philadelphia area along with dozens of Roman Catholic Churches, parish schools, and chapels in Philadelphia, other Pennsylvania cities, and New Jersey. Ironically, the architectural firm selected to design the Board's "Bonedry battle monument"—which would serve as the Protestant rebuttal to Catholic influence in Washington, had built a reputation by designing Roman Catholic churches, parochial schools, convents, and seminaries.⁸⁴

Conclusion

But before the Board broke ground on its new building, Catholics started work on a building of their own. In September 1920, Cardinal Gibbons laid the cornerstone for the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.⁸⁵ Plans had been underway for this national cathedral

⁸² Ballinger Company, *Buildings for Commerce and Industry*. (Philadelphia; New York: The Ballinger Company, 1924), 23.

⁸³ Joint Meeting, Executive and Finance Committees, April 24, 1917, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁸⁴ Ballinger & Perrot, *Institutions, Churches, Schools* (Philadelphia: Ballinger & Perrot, 1914).

⁸⁵ "Immaculate Conception Shrine Site Is Blessed," *Washington Evening Star*, May 17, 1920; "Cardinal Gibbons Dedicates Stone for Great Shrine," *Washington Evening Star*, September 24, 1920.

honoring the Virgin Mary since 1913, before the Board had relocated to Washington, yet the Board overlooked the head start and described the groundbreaking ceremony as proof once again of “Romanism’s power” in the nation’s capital. And as before, the author used the Catholic’s new National Shrine as a foil to stoke the competitive drive of MEC members. “Do not criticize the Catholics for displaying such admirable zeal for the prestige of their church,” the article urged its readers. “Go and do likewise.” Though the Board had used the Catholics to drum up fundraising support for years, the event of laying the cornerstone for the National Shrine likely inspired a sense of urgency. That month, the Board published preliminary drawings of floorplans for its building. This not only tantalized readers regarding what the future building would look like, but also provided more substantial evidence that the Board’s building was in progress. As readers learned of the Catholics breaking ground uptown, they also saw the first plans for a six-story building on the lot, including three floors of residential apartments, three floors of offices, and large gathering areas such as an auditorium and a tea room.⁸⁶ After three years of reading how the Board would transform national affairs with a proposed building, MEC readers finally had a chance to peer inside.

Throughout the fall, the Board continued to use the construction of the Catholic National Shrine to highlight the urgency for constructing the Board’s building for the MEC. The Board informed its readers that the Knights of Columbus had donated \$5 million to construct the National Shrine, particularly emphasizing that one benefactor funded the entire construction project. “Perhaps, under all the circumstances, it would not be a bad idea for the Methodist Church to spend a small sum of five hundred thousand dollars to erect in Washington a

⁸⁶ Tweed, *America’s Church*, 7, 152–157; “Why a Big Building Is Needed,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, September 1920.

headquarters for the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals,” wrote the *Voice*.

The next month, the *Voice* offered increasingly dire predictions about the future of Washington if the Board did not build for the MEC.

I am not criticising [*sic*] these people—I am taking my hat off to them. If they continue to evidence similar brains and energy, and Methodism, as the force of Protestantism in America, continues to dream and neglect, we will soon face a condition of affairs in Washington most menacing to the welfare of the American people. It is inevitable that the Board of Temperance should personify Methodism in the nation’s capital, that it should stand at the doors of the White House and Legislative Halls as an indication of Protestant power and activity.⁸⁷

That the Board devoted so much attention to construction of the National Shrine demonstrated vividly how the Board’s public Protestantism concerned itself more with a Protestant-versus-Catholic binary rather than racism and segregation in Washington. Shortly before Catholics laid the cornerstone to the National Shrine, the Board paid scant attention to racial violence in Washington during July 1919, which was known as “Red summer” for the violence in cities across the nation. Starting July 19, 1919, violence erupted in the city when a white mob attacked black residents over a rumored rape of a white woman by a black man.⁸⁸ The so-called “race riot,” as the all-white paper *Washington Star* referred to the violence, resulted in fifteen deaths, including ten white and five black. Wilson awkwardly adopted a colorblind framework and attributed the violence to alcohol, overlooking local African American perspectives and instead co-opting the event to reiterate the Protestant-Catholic binary on Prohibition.⁸⁹ “If Washington had not been a dry city, hundreds would have been killed,” he wrote vocalizing the same assumption that many other white mainline Protestant ministers

⁸⁷ Clarence True Wilson, “Make Methodism Mighty in Washington,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, November 1920.

⁸⁸ Kenneth D. Ackerman, *Young J. Edgar: Hoover, the Red Scare, 1919-1920* (Falls Church, Va.: Viral History Press, 2011), 60–62.

⁸⁹ Green, *The Secret City; a History of Race Relations in the Nation’s Capital*, 191–193.

shared. His peers had blamed racial tension in Jim Crow-era Washington on alcohol for several decades, and now Wilson joined the fray. Like them, he prescribed temperance and prohibition, suggesting that the violence and death toll would have been higher had it not been for prohibition. “The only hope of preventing these riots is in the fact that these people are sober and will listen to reason.” Such interpretations minimized racial tension in comparison to concern for alcoholic consumption, eliding the perspectives of the city’s African Americans, who did not attribute the violence to alcohol, but to the actions of several individuals.⁹⁰

The Board’s move to Washington compelled the organization to embrace a national identity and articulate a sense of public Protestantism. The MEC’s national ambitions brought the Board to Washington to fight for Prohibition, but the Board’s expanded scope of undefined “public morals” required that the organization remain in the capital city. Rather than pack up and claim victory, the Board used the passage of Prohibition as a starting point to concretize the mission for national influence and assert claims to shape federal morality laws. Because of the Board’s expanded mission as a promoter of “public morals,” it found a building, even if only on paper and in blueprints, to be an important site to promote its public Protestantism. By the official start of Prohibition in 1920, the Board began drawing floor plans for the proposed building. The Board’s sense of public Protestantism, however, overlooked and excluded much, including the local, urban setting and the realities of Jim Crow. Instead it embraced whiteness and defined itself in opposition to Catholicism. The Board and its future Capitol Hill-building were of Washington, but not in the largely African American District of Columbia.

⁹⁰ “Capitol Not Dry, Pastor Discovers,” *Washington Times*, July 28, 1919.

Chapter Two: A Cornerstone of Public Morals: The Religious Significance of the Methodist Building, 1923-1929

Introduction

On a clear, cloudless day in mid-November 1922, Clarence True Wilson and his wife, Maude Aiken Wilson, threw a ceremonial shovelful of dirt at the Board's lot at First Street and Maryland Avenue, NE. At that time, the property was still an empty, tree-filled lot across from the U.S. Capitol Building. Through the trees' bare mid-November branches, one could clearly see the Senate Office Building.¹ This action was to be the first of many events, ceremonies, meetings, and pieces of material culture in which the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals attributed religious significance to the plot of land across the street from the U.S. Capitol. This triangular plot of land, which city planners and government official referred to as "square 726," the lot's assigned number in urban plans, was transformed both physically and spiritually through Board members' actions.²

That the Board ascribed religious meaning to a building of offices and apartments was neither inevitable nor unintentional. This happened through the set of social processes enacted by the people who built, used, and lived in the Methodist Building. Even before the building's construction, when the Board had just purchased property, Wilson had described the future structure as fulfilling a religious purpose, explaining that the future building "will be a center of temperance, Methodism, and Protestantism, to stand as a fort against the assaults of the legions

¹ "Beginning of Construction of the New Methodist Building at 110 Maryland Avenue NE" November 1922, CHS 07083, General Photograph Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

² G. Wm Baist, Wm. E Baist, and H. V Baist, "Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes" (Philadelphia: G. Wm. Baist, 1921), plate 14.

of lobbyists of corruption.”³ However, the groundbreaking commenced a new phase in the Board’s work of investing the building with religious meaning because during and after the period of construction, it was no longer only a vague ambition on paper. In his annual report to the Board delivered a few weeks after the groundbreaking, Wilson said, “the hard tasks that have fallen to our lot in twelve years,” since he assumed leadership of the Church Temperance Society in 1910, “is to have its culmination in an epoch-making enterprise.” He added that when the MEC General Conference instructed the Board to move to Washington, D.C. in 1916, the assembly also instructed the Board “with specific instructions that we should secure a building site and erect a building worthy of our denomination in this city.”⁴

Wilson’s remarks about the new building suggested that it represented a fulfillment of the MEC’s religious mission in Washington, but in fact, as chapter one discussed, the 1916 General Conference never explicitly directed the Board to construct a building upon moving to Washington.⁵ This statement was Wilson’s own interpretation that an office and apartment building fulfilled the Board’s purpose. While historically inaccurate, statements such as this one help explain how Wilson and other the Board members invested the Capitol Hill building with religious meaning. This chapter examines the religious practices that people adopted toward the Methodist Building, including actions at public ceremonies, behavior at meetings, and uses of

³ “Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals,” *Yearbook of the Methodist Episcopal Church* 85 (1918): 159.

⁴ Clarence True Wilson, “12th Annual Report of the General Secretary,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, December 1922.

⁵ For example, neither of the resolutions recommending the Board move to Washington, D.C. even mention a building. Henry P. Bennett and New Jersey Conference, “Memorial to the General Conference on the Location of the Temperance Society” May 5, 1916; W.R. Wedderspoon, Baltimore Conference, and W.L. McDowell, “Memorial on the Location of the Temperance Society” May 5, 1916, General Conference Records, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

material culture, in order to appreciate how those who inhabited the Methodist Building understood its religious significance as embodying public Protestantism.

The Public Protestantism of Religious Architecture in Washington D.C. and American Methodism

As a denominational office on Capitol Hill, the Methodist Building inhabited a unique position at the intersection of religious architecture in Washington, D.C. and in American Methodism. In order to appreciate how Board members expressed public Protestantism through the Methodist Building, it is necessary to understand the religious landscape of Washington, D.C., as well as the history of Methodist religious architecture and understandings of sacred space. In 1920s Washington, the Methodist Building was just one of many religious buildings under construction. During the same period, Catholics built the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and Episcopalians, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and other Protestant denominations each built national churches in Washington. In a March 1923 *Washington Post* article—published hardly over a month after the cornerstone of the Methodist Building was laid on January 28—the author described the recent trend in religious building as offering contemporary Washingtonians a reminder of the founders’ Christian faith. “It is inspiring that the great Capital of a great nation which sets forth in its Declaration of Independence and other state papers its belief in a Higher Power, should bear such abiding witness that America is still true to the faith of founders of the republic, and in God puts its trust,” wrote journalist Elisabeth Ellicott Poe. Her comments echo the central claim in public Protestantism that Protestants have a right to exercise influence in American public life because of the outsize role Protestant Christianity played in shaping American democracy. Poe celebrated

the religious building boom as Protestants making Washington as the political capital into the nation's "spiritual capital."⁶

As Poe's remarks imply, the religious building boom in Washington reveals how Protestants used architecture to express their identity as the Protestant establishment. The project of performing public Protestantism through architecture differs from claiming Washington, D.C. as a sacred city in American civil religion. In his original 1791 plan for the city of Washington, Pierre L'Enfant initially conceived of the planned capital city as a republican Versailles, including a national church.⁷ In American civil religion, scholars Jeffrey Meyer, David Chidester, and Edward Linenthal describe Washington, D.C. as an idealized, sacred city, each building upon Robert N. Bellah's work that interprets the symbols, figures, and themes in American history along biblical archetypes. Meyer examines the monuments and museums on the National Mall as pilgrimage sites of civil religion, where visitors uncover the ultimate meaning and purpose of American identity. He contends that the National Archives is more of a national church than the Episcopal National Cathedral, because the National Archives is "the repository of the nation's 'biblical texts,'" referring to the Constitution and the Declaration of

⁶ Elisabeth Ellicot Poe, "Religious Life in Washington Keeps Pace with Rising Tide of Religion in Nation," *Washington Post*, March 4, 1923. Throughout the rest of the 1920s, articles that toured the various denominations' national churches in Washington became a recurring story. Each mentioned the history of L'Enfant's original plan for a national church, and each dubbed Washington the spiritual or religious capital. One especially perceptive article compared early twentieth-century Washington to nineteenth-century Brooklyn, whose churches per capita earned the city on the East River the moniker "The City of Churches." See also: Walter Harris, "Washington Is Fast Becoming Religious Center of the United States," *Washington Post*, November 22, 1925, sec. Sunday Magazine; Helen Essary, "Washington Becomes a City of Shrines," *New York Times*, April 1, 1928.

⁷ Scott W. Berg, *Grand Avenues: The Story of the French Visionary Who Designed Washington, D.C.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 78–80; Cynthia R. Field, Isabelle Gournay, and Thomas P. Somma, *Paris on the Potomac: the French Influence on the Architecture and Art of Washington, D.C.* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 12; "The L'Enfant & McMillan Plans," National Park Service, n.d., <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/wash/lenfant.htm>.

Independence.⁸ Likewise, Chidester and Linenthal emphasized Washington, D.C. as the “ritual core” of the American patriotic landscape, where monuments, memorials, and museums convey myths of American civil religion and national identity through symbols and images.⁹ The religious building boom in 1920s Washington did not create a national church as L’Enfant had imagined, nor promote an American civil religion as Bellah, Meyer, Chidester, and Linenthal describe, but instead reflected the core assumption in public Protestantism that Protestant Christianity shaped American democratic institutions.

As a national headquarters for the MEC on Capitol Hill, the Methodist Building expressed aspirations for Protestant recognition in American public life. Like other denominations’ national churches that were under construction in the nation’s capital at the time, the Methodist Building represented American Methodism’s desire to assert its identity as part of the Protestant establishment. Because the Methodist Building was conceived as the place where the MEC would advocate to Congress about matters of public morals, the building embodied public Protestantism’s aspirations for governing on the basis of a Protestant identity. This chapter argues that the Methodist Building embodied the assertion in public Protestantism that Protestants have the authority to shape federal morality laws because of the influence that this religious tradition had on American democracy.

Though its Washington location made the Methodist Building unique, the building reflected early twentieth-century trends in Methodist religious architecture. Since the late nineteenth century, Methodist congregations withdrew from city downtowns to more affluent

⁸ Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1–21; Jeffrey F. Meyer, *Myths in Stone: Religious Dimensions of Washington, D.C.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 77.

⁹ David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), especially 12–15.

residential neighborhoods and built large, impressive, stone structures in order to entice wealthy and middle-class Americans to attend their churches. These churches, often displaying the rounded arch windows and vaulted ceilings in the same Romanesque revival style that public buildings such as libraries, post offices, courthouses, and railroad stations constructed during this period also displayed, similarly embraced a public mission and identity through their architecture.¹⁰

By the early twentieth century, Methodists also built mixed-use buildings including office, residential, and worship space. In Philadelphia, the same architectural firm that later designed the Methodist Building in Washington, D.C. for the Board of Temperance, also built the Wesley Building for the MEC Board of Home Missions. The Wesley Building, opened in 1915 and located at Arch and 17th Streets, featured a gothic revival style exterior façade with narrow, pointed arched windows, vaulted interior ceilings, and ornately carved stone work. Inside included six stories of offices for Board and other Methodist bureaucratic agencies, followed by eight stories of hotel rooms above.¹¹ Methodists in Chicago followed the example of their Philadelphia peers in 1922 and razed the city's First ME Church located on Chicago's loop at Clark and Washington Streets, and replaced it with a 21-story gothic skyscraper called the Chicago Temple. The Chicago Temple, which opened nine months after the Methodist Building in Washington, in September 1924, included a gothic cathedral sanctuary on the ground floor,

¹⁰ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 107.

¹¹ The Ballinger Company, "The Wesley Building and Robert Morris Hotel," *Architecture*, December 1923; Ballinger Company, *Buildings for Commerce and Industry*. (Philadelphia; New York: The Ballinger Company, 1924), 23; "Methodist Building Soon to Be Opened," *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, April 24, 1915; "Methodist Ministers Meet," *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, September 13, 1915.

followed by Institutional Church rooms like a kitchen, auditorium, and social rooms, with the remaining floors rented as office space. At the top of the Chicago Temple was a gothic style cathedral spire.¹² The year that the Chicago Temple opened, not to be outdone by their Windy City brethren, New York Methodists entertained even more gargantuan ambitions by proposing to build a 40-story church in Washington Heights. Called Broadway Temple, the proposed structure would also contain a sanctuary on the ground floor, but unlike the Chicago Temple, it would include dozens of stories of apartment units, as well as floors for educational, social, and recreational activities of the church. The church opened in 1930, flanked by two apartment buildings, but the 40-story tower was never completed.¹³

Journalists, Methodists, and other mainline Protestants heralded these religious buildings as modern innovations, promising to redeem and witness to changing urban centers in America. Such religious architecture enabled Methodists, like other mainline Protestant denominations, to demonstrate their wealth, power and respectability as part of the Protestant establishment. But for Methodists in particular, the added social respectability and prestige such buildings conferred brought both criticism or unease. Historian of religion Jean Halgren Kilde recounts the example of one Methodist bishop who objected on theological grounds to the dedication of a new Methodist church in Wisconsin and declined to attend, writing, “Methodists don’t spend money

¹² W.B. Norton, “Chicago Temple Cornerstone Laid: Dawes Praises Methodism at Loop Dedication,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 6, 1922; W.B. Norton, “Methodists to Dedicate Loop Temple,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 26, 1924.

¹³ Christian F. Rentier, “Broadway Temple to Emphasize Attractive Side of Religion: Great Edifice to Be Built by Sale of Bonds,” *New York Herald Tribune*, September 28, 1924; “What Broadway Temple Will Do For New York,” *Christian Advocate*, November 20, 1924; “Broadway Temple Dedication Today,” *New York Times*, June 29, 1930; Jim Rasenberger, “Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda: New York Thrives on Grand Schemes. Many of the Grandest--Say, a 40-Story Church--Never Leave the Realm of Dreams,” *New York Times*, August 1, 2004.

on buildings; they spend money on missions.”¹⁴ This bishop, would likely have been what was considered a “croaker,” a term in American Methodism for aging Methodists who complained about their successors abandoning the zeal of the early itinerant preachers in favor of worldliness. The term croakers, which had been in use since the middle of the nineteenth century, David Hempton suggests, advocated a return to the primitive simplicity and energy of itinerants. Hempton argued that Methodism’s establishment identity, which included holding real estate, proved an awkward transition for a religious tradition that originated as a revivalist movement.¹⁵ Hempton and other Methodist studies scholars pointed to frontier camp meetings and outdoor revivals as the spaces where itinerant preachers inspired zeal among adherents. Yet, as Kilde explained, the spaces of camp meetings were quite different from the religious architecture Methodists embraced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Camp meetings were informal, outdoor spaces, where people would pull together benches and a preacher might stand on a carton or another makeshift stool to elevate the preacher. Outdoor spaces occupied special places in Methodist history: both John Wesley and George Whitefield preached to crowds of thousands, including various races, classes, and genders, in large, outdoor revivals.¹⁶ As a revival movement, cathedrals and urban religious buildings heralded Methodism asserting its role as part of the Protestant establishment, but were awkward expressions of the movement’s earlier revivalism and mobility.

¹⁴ Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 168.

¹⁵ David Hempton, *Methodism Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 126, 146, 199; John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 17–18, 32.

The Board's efforts to claim that the Methodist Building embodied public Protestantism emerged out of this contested landscape. As the state of Methodist religious architecture suggests, there was an open debate about whether such spaces were considered sacred space, or even religiously significant. At the same time, the early twentieth-century MEC established more uniform orders of worship, published its first hymnal of church-sanctioned songs, and prospective ministers underwent rigorous sermon preparation as part of seminary educations. Once again, "croakers" pointed to this pattern of settled respectability as encroaching on the former spontaneity of the Methodist movement.¹⁷ As Ruth Alden Doan has explained, early American Methodists did not consider their worship spaces as inherently sacred; it was the quality of religious experience of the group gathered that produced a sense of sacredness. Methodist theology emphasized the communal, social and corporate identity of worship, so it was the social processes of the group that made Methodist spaces sacred.¹⁸ Not only does this indicate that Board leaders enacted deliberate social processes to assign religious significance to the Methodist Building, it also illustrates that the Board's efforts to position the building as embodying public Protestantism occurred at a time when American Methodism faced anxieties over its emerging identity as a settled denomination, and part of the Protestant establishment. The actions of Board leaders illustrate that in their efforts to express their public Protestantism through the Methodist Building they positioned the building as religiously significant.¹⁹

¹⁷ Frederick Abbott Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism; a History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 327–329.

¹⁸ Ruth Alden Doan, "Worship, Experience, and the Creation of Methodist Place," in *By the Vision of Another World: Worship in American History*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 36–59; Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 45; David Hempton, *Methodism Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 78–80.

¹⁹ Unlike sacred space, which implies a cosmic separation of space and time because of divine presence, religious significance connotes no such cosmic separation. Religious significance

The Cornerstone Ceremony, January 1923

The public ceremonies celebrating the Methodist Building illustrate how Board leaders sought to express their public Protestantism through the building. In the cornerstone-laying ceremony in 1923 and the Methodist Building's opening in 1924, two events separated by less than a year, Board leaders employed practices and articulated narratives that celebrated the Methodist Building as embodying their aspiration to shape federal laws on the basis of their Protestant identity. The religious narratives and performances at the ceremonies enabled the Board to invest the Methodist Building with religious meaning, and serve as a visible reminder of its mission to advocate for and represent Protestant morality on Capitol Hill.

The architect, Walter Ballinger, specifically designed the Methodist Building to reflect some of the major architectural themes in the nation's capital. In the *Washington Post*'s coverage of the November 1922 groundbreaking event, the *Post* explained that the Board's headquarters would "harmonize architecturally with the Capitol, Senate and House office buildings, Congressional library, and Union Station, all of which are in the same vicinity."²⁰ By the turn of the twentieth century, public buildings in Washington, D.C. began to adopt the Beaux Arts style, an aesthetic style that often included white stone, arched windows and doors, symmetrical features, sculptures such as bas-reliefs, and classical details, such as columns. As architectural historian Isabelle Gournay explains, the Beaux Arts style embraced many of the themes of the neoclassical style, which significantly informed L'Enfant's plan for Washington, as well as

refers to the public importance of religion in American culture, much like public Protestantism. This chapter adopts the orientation that religious significance and sacred space, are social designation conferred through a series of performances and practices.

²⁰ "Work on New Methodist Home: Center for Denomination's Interests to be at First and Maryland N.E.," *Washington Post*, November 18, 1922.

informing both the style of the Capitol and the White House.²¹ To some degree, Ballinger and the Board had no choice but to complement the surrounding federal government buildings with their new structure. The Commission on Fine Arts, established by Congress in 1910, held responsibility for reviewing and approving all proposed building abutting any federal property. As the Methodist Building was across from the Capitol Building and adjacent to the plot of land where the Supreme Court would later be, the Board's plans fell under the Commission's review. After several delays, the Commission granted approval to the Board to "conform to the type of the Capitol group."²²

Yet to attribute the Methodist Building design entirely to bureaucratic compliance would be inaccurate. Ballinger and the Board eagerly mirrored the architectural style of federal government buildings and national monuments in order to express their public Protestantism. The Board described the significance of the Methodist Building's architecture, "The building is of white stone and is a credible associate of the government buildings which surround it. It stands in Washington as the chief symbol of Methodism's patriotic zeal in behalf of civic righteousness."²³ By appropriating the architectural trends commonly employed in public buildings in Washington, Ballinger designed the Methodist Building to visually announce it was part of the culture of American democratic institutions and therefore assert their authority as Protestants to participate in the American government. Ballinger's intentional decision to design

²¹ Isabelle Gournay, "The French Connection in Washington, D.C." in *Paris on the Potomac the French Influence on the Architecture and Art of Washington, D.C.*, 12; G. Martin Moeller, American Institute of Architects, and Washington Metropolitan Chapter, *AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

²² "Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts" November 1921, page 8, Records of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.

²³ "Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals," *Yearbook of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1924: 174.

the Methodist Building to look like federal government buildings served as a declaration of the central assumption in public Protestantism that Protestant Christianity exercised historic influence in shaping American democracy. By mimicking the architectural design, Ballinger used the Methodist Building to assert Protestants' claims for shaping American public life.

The Christian Advocate Spreads

A little over two months after the groundbreaking in November 1922, the cornerstone laying approached in late January 1923, a ritualized, symbolic event that featured significant pageantry. In the month leading up to the cornerstone laying, the *Christian Advocate*, the weekly periodical for the MEC denomination, published four issues with two-page spreads displaying the Methodist Building and the work of the Board. These richly illustrated newspaper pages situated the Methodist Building within the landscape of Washington, D.C. and portrayed the Board as working at the seat of power. These newsprint pages likely served as fundraising solicitations for the Board, as the building still needed funds for construction. Equally important, however, these large advertisements functioned to introduce the new Methodist Building to the MEC. As many MEC members lived outside of Washington, D.C., these full-page illustrated ads helped present the future Methodist Building to people who may not physically visit the space. Therefore, these full-page advertisements demonstrate how the Board desired to present the Methodist Building to MEC members, and how Board leaders imagined it would fit in Washington. For these reasons, the two-page spreads are valuable sites to begin inquiry into how the Board attributed religious significance to its building.

Each week over the month of January, the two-page spreads featured the Board and the Methodist Building in a different context: first the Methodist Building in Washington, D.C., then the Board in the world, then the Board in the U.S., and finally, returning to Washington, D.C.

Collectively, these pages suggest an ever-widening scope of influence for the Board with Washington, D.C. and the Methodist Building in particular as the central nexus of their influence. In both the spreads featuring the Board's work across the globe and across the U.S., maps visually illustrate how the Board placed itself at the center of power in Washington, D.C. In the January 11, 1923 advertisement, which featured an illustrated map of the world, Washington, D.C. (and the United States) sits at the visual center of the page. The viewer's eye is drawn to the center of the image, where a large black circular dot indicates the location of Washington. From this point, lines radiate outward to Australia, India, Mexico, Western Europe, and South America. With this map, the Board positions itself at the center of the world from which it influences other parts of the world in their work on temperance.²⁴ The map of the United States, which appeared in the following issue on January 18, 1923, featured the continental U.S., with the title "Making Prohibition a Reality in Every Part of the Nation." Although Washington, D.C. is not the visual center of this map, the image again uses lines connecting cities across the U.S. to Washington, D.C., creating the effect of Washington, D.C. as the center from which everything radiated. This map, surrounded by illustrations of newspaper clippings about Wilson and the Board's work on Prohibition, furthered the impression that the Board based in Washington had a national reach, impacting lives of Americans all across the country.²⁵

²⁴ "Where the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals of the Methodist Episcopal Church Is at Work," *Christian Advocate*, January 11, 1923: 46–47.

²⁵ "Making Prohibition a Reality in Every Part of the Nation," *Christian Advocate*, January 18, 1923: 80-81.



Figure 2.1 “Where the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals of the Methodist Episcopal Church is at Work,” *Christian Advocate*, January 11, 1923: 46-47. The Burke Theological Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

By the time of the *Advocate*'s publication, the Board's mission had evolved significantly to reflect what the images portrayed. Having been directed to advocate for prohibition in Washington on behalf of the MEC in 1916, the Board shifted its work after the Eighteenth Amendment's ratification in 1918 and enactment in 1920. The 1920 *Discipline*—the first written since Prohibition went into effect—expanded the Board's mission after Prohibition, charging the Board “to enforce existing statutory laws and constitutional provisions,” instead of securing “the speedy enactment” of a constitutional amendment. That *Discipline* also began to define the scope of Board's work on “public morals,” explaining that the Board was created “to make more

effectual the efforts of the Church to create a Christian public sentiment, which will relate the principles of the gospel of Christ to the economical [*sic*], political, industrial, and social relations of life, which will crystallize opposition to all public violations of moral law.”²⁶ In practice, Wilson interpreted the charge to “crystallize opposition to all public violations of moral law” by using his platform as General Secretary to address the social ills of smoking, gambling, and motion pictures.²⁷ As Joseph Allen Land observed in his study of the Board’s organizational structure, the Board’s constitution provided only broad principles, granting it significant latitude in its daily operations.²⁸ At the same time that the Board broadened its issues of concern for reform, it also globalized its work for temperance. The Board’s minutes from 1917 to 1922 show the organization promoted prohibition abroad by occasionally funding the positions of several foreign secretaries.²⁹ Both the national and international ongoing programmatic efforts of the Board, evince the organization’s aspirations for a national and global influence, which is what each of the two *Advocate* spreads portrayed.

²⁶ Methodist Episcopal Church et al., *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1920*. (New York; Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920), § 490.

²⁷ For example, the ad “Making Prohibition a Reality in Every Part of the Nation,” includes images of leaflets on dancing, public schools, tobacco, and Sunday movies. “Making Prohibition a Reality in Every Part of the Nation,” *Christian Advocate*, January 18, 1923: 80-81.

²⁸ Joseph Land Allen, “The Methodist Board of Temperance as an Instrument of Church Policy” (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1957), 63–64.

²⁹ Annual meeting minutes, December 4, 1917, page 2; November 25, 1919, page 3; October 26, 1920 page 3; December 5, 1922 page 3, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey. As the break in years suggest, the positions for the “foreign field” were infrequent, and no explanation was given why they started or why they were discontinued.

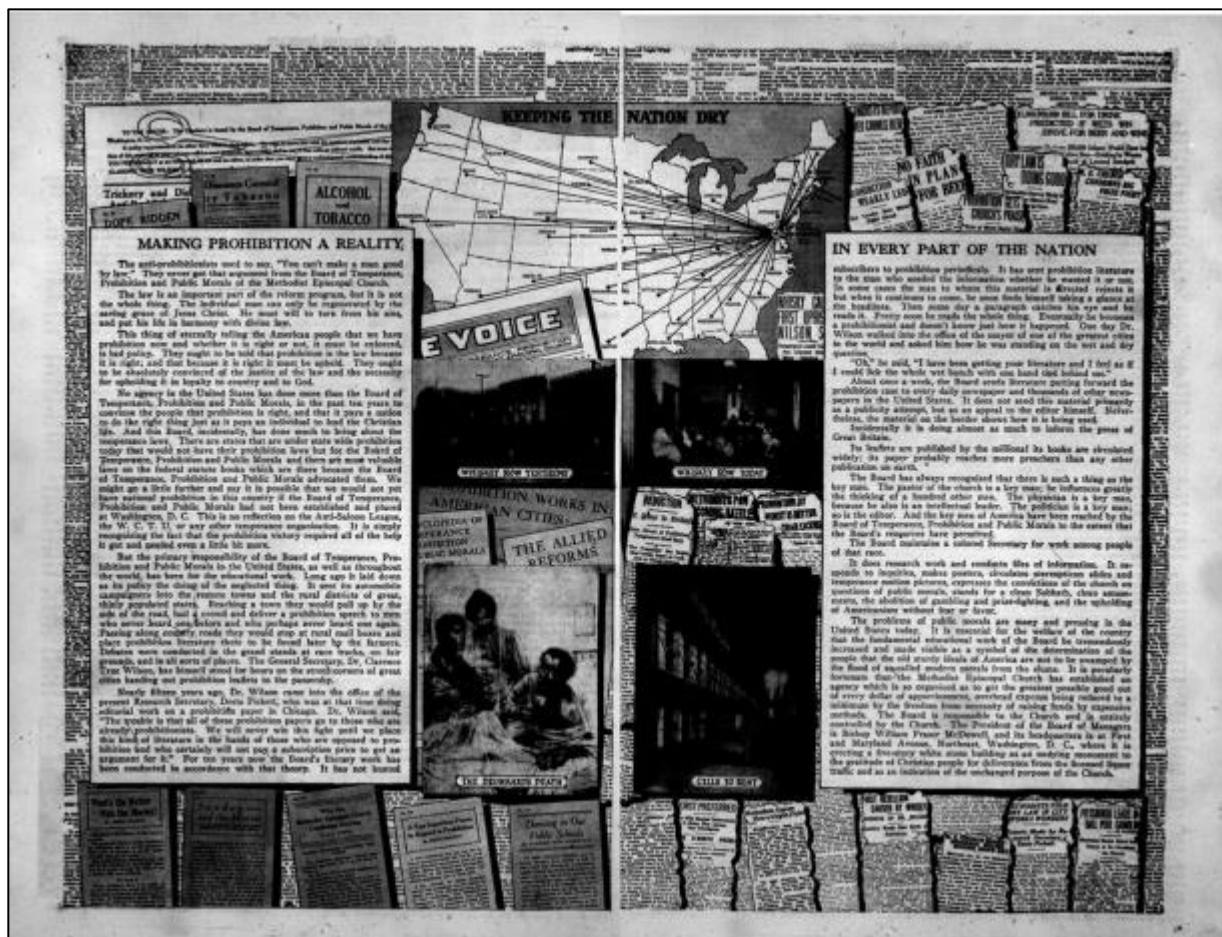


Figure 2.2 “Making Prohibition a Reality in Every Part of the Nation,” *Christian Advocate*, January 18, 1923: 80-81. The Burke Theological Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Neither of these map illustrations include an image of the Methodist Building, but because they present Washington, D.C. as the center of the nation and the world, these two spreads set important context for the two spreads that focused on Washington, D.C. Appearing in the *Christian Advocate* issues on the first and fourth weeks of January 1923, the Washington, D.C. visual spreads act as bookends to the maps charting the Board’s impact. Both two-page illustrations, on January 3 and 25, 1923, respectively, display images of the Methodist Building. The January 3 spread, as the title “At the Nation’s Capital: The Methodist Episcopal Church” suggested, placed the Methodist Building with the landscape of Washington, D.C., helping to situate Methodism as part of the Protestant establishment, as well as demonstrate the influence

Methodist institutions exerted in Washington. A large drawing of the Methodist Building is featured prominently in the center of the left page; on the right page, in a mirror image position is an image of the U.S. Capitol Building. If the two map spreads created the impression of situating Washington, D.C. at the center of the world, this spread's juxtaposition of images situates the Methodist Building at the center of Washington, placing the structure on par with Capitol, visually illustrating its architectural likeness to the Capitol and demonstrating the "patriotic zeal in behalf of civic righteousness" Ballinger intended for the Board headquarters. On each page, smaller images surround the two large images. The Methodist Building is framed by three smaller images of MEC institutions in Washington, including a hospital, Metropolitan Memorial MEC, and a MEC children's home; the Capitol Building is framed by a MEC home for the aged, a university in Washington historically affiliated with the MEC, and the Washington monument. While the Capitol-Methodist Building juxtaposition remind the viewer of the location of the Methodist Building and situate it at the center of power, these additional images help to celebrate the institutional presence of Methodism in Washington, D.C. The images portray Methodism as part of the Protestant establishment, informing and shaping the culture in the nation's capital, a starkly different view of Washington from the version Wilson had painted several years before, full of Catholic institutions.³⁰

³⁰ "At the Nation's Capital: The Methodist Episcopal Church," *Christian Advocate*, January 4, 1923: 16–17.

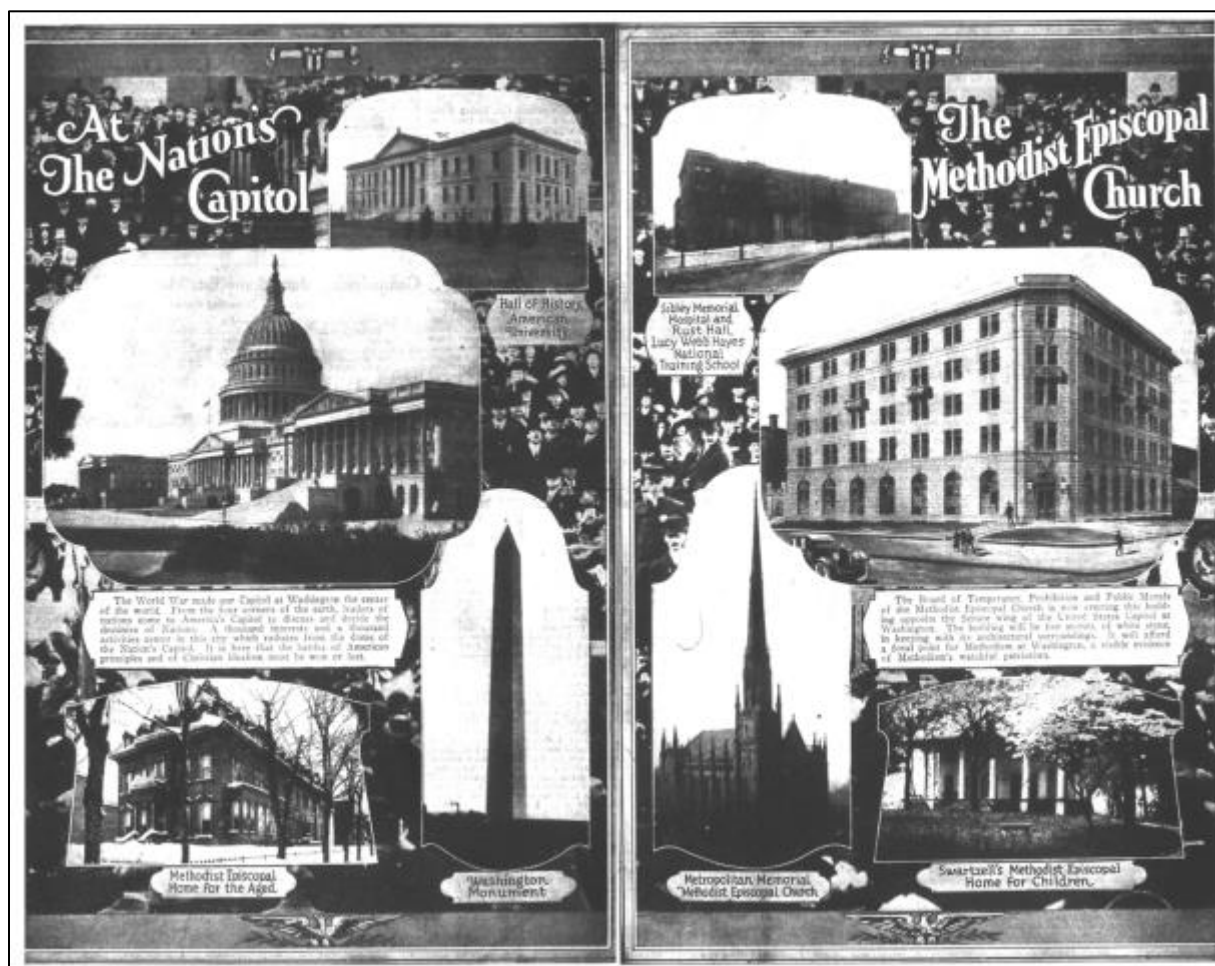


Figure 2.3 “At the Nation’s Capitol: The Methodist Episcopal Church,” *Christian Advocate*, January 4, 1923: 16-17. The Burke Theological Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

The final spread, published in the January 25, 1923 issue—three days before the cornerstone-laying ceremony on January 28, 1923 —extended this metaphor of the Board and the Methodist Building at the center of power. Once again, the spread featured an image of the Methodist Building superimposed over the Capitol. The juxtaposition of the two buildings in the image did not reflect how the two structures would actually appear in relation to each other in the built environment of Washington, erasing any spatial difference. The visual overlay of the Methodist Building on the Capitol—like a child placing a sticker directly on top of an image in a picture book—not only created the impression that the Methodist Building was the newest

addition to Capitol Hill, but also demonstrated the close physical proximity of the Board would have to Congress. To emphasize this purpose, the spread featured photos and short quotes from prominent politicians (all of whom were white males) each offering testimonials for the Board's work in Washington. The quotes, which came from a Senator, two Congressmen, and the federal Prohibition Commissioner, as well as Wilson and McDowell, referred to the Board's past work in support of prohibition and the Eighteenth Amendment and emphasized the urgency for the Board's continued involvement in national politics. Congressman A.P. Nelson of Wisconsin said, "The magnificent building now in progress, will be an added impetus to its [the MEC's] great work for the Nation's welfare," directly connecting the MEC's past history of social reform with the Board's future Methodist Building. Quotes from figures such as Nelson helped to legitimize the new building as part of the landscape of Washington.³¹

³¹ "What Men of Affairs Are Saying About It," *Christian Advocate*, January 25, 1923: 112–113.

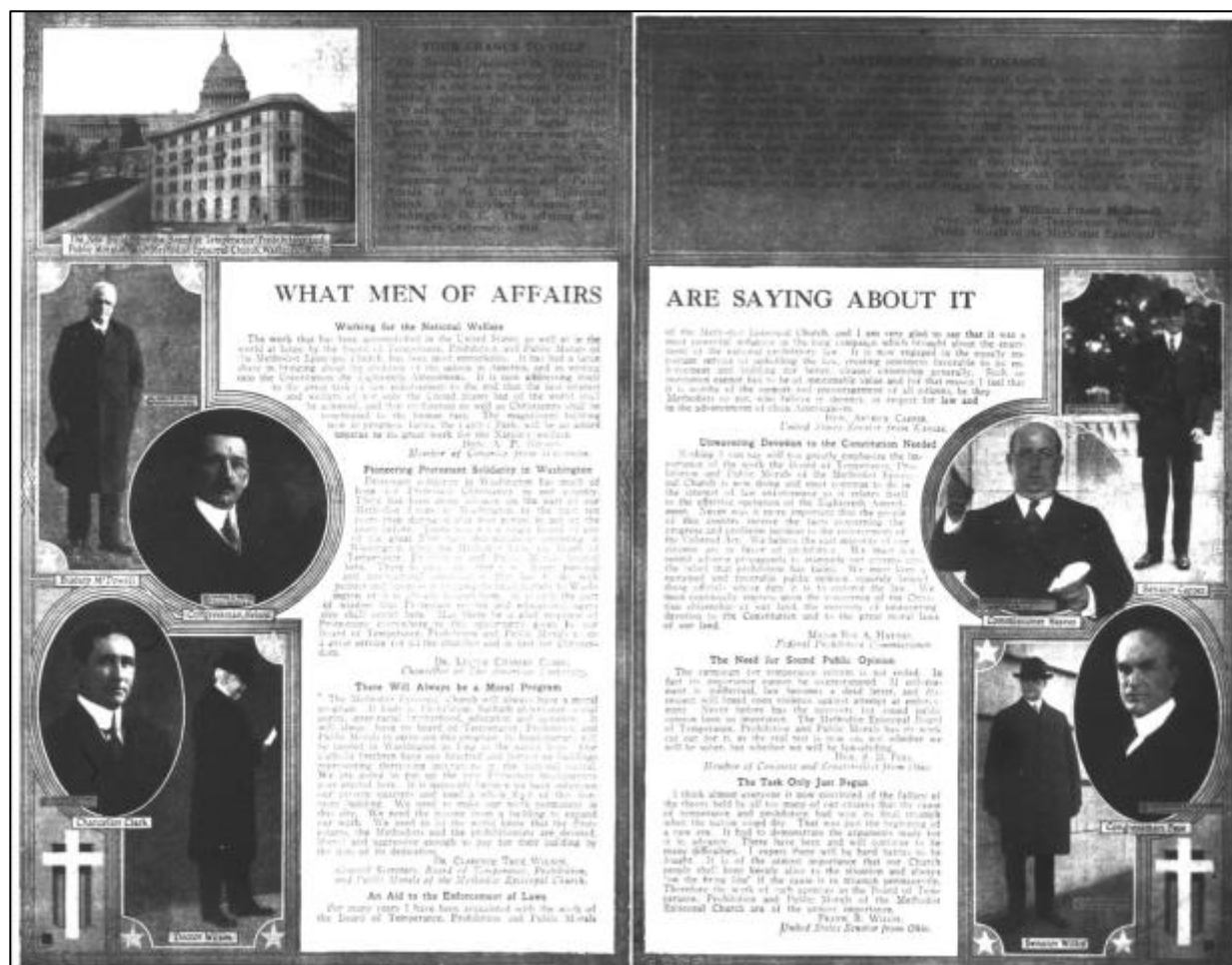


Figure 2.4 “What Men of Affairs are Saying About It,” *Christian Advocate*, January 25, 1923: 112-113. The Burke Theological Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

More than any of the other two-page spreads, this final spread attempted to leverage the narrative of the Board as an ambassador of public Protestantism in order to raise funds for the new Methodist Building. At the top left page, adjacent to the image of the Methodist and Capitol Buildings, was a brief note entitled “YOUR CHANCE TO HELP.” It encouraged MEC ministers, who were the readers of the *Christian Advocate*, to hold a special offering for the construction of the Methodist Building on Sunday, January 28, 1923, the same date that the

Building's cornerstone would be laid.³² Earlier in that same issue, the *Advocate* reported on the construction of the Methodist Building, describing it as “A National Methodist Building” that would “belong to the Methodist people generally.” The *Advocate* described the Methodist Building as more than just the Board's headquarters, and encouraged MEC members to donate to the building fund, noting that about half of the estimated \$500,000 still needed to be raised. This fundraising solicitation, which referenced all four of that January's spreads about the Board, capitalized on the narratives of public Protestantism that each spread embraced. The spreads helped to sell the Methodist Building to Methodists across the country as a religiously significant building worthy of being built in the nation's capital.³³

Pledge cards dated from this period, before and immediately after the cornerstone-laying event, also embraced themes of public Protestantism. Though no images appeared on the pledge cards—either of the Methodist Building or the U.S. Capitol Building—the language makes clear the significance of the location. Pledge cards language varied, but they either stated their purpose as for “the erection of a new National Methodist Headquarters in Washington, D.C.,” or “For a Permanent Protestant Building at the Nation's Capital,” or “the erection of a Methodist Building in the Nation's Capital.” The varied language choices showed that while the Board lacked a coherent tagline, leaders clearly wanted to communicate to MEC members that the location of the proposed Methodist Building was connected to Methodism's aspirations for public influence and recognition as both Methodists and Protestants. Like the *Advocate* spreads, the pledge cards appealed to MEC ambitions for national influence in Washington.³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ “A National Methodist Building,” *Christian Advocate*, January 25, 1923: 102-103.

³⁴ “For a Permanent Building at the Nation's Capital,” pledge card, October 18, 1922; “Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals,” circa June 1923, General Board of Church and

Cornerstone Ceremony

During the cornerstone-laying ceremony a few days later, on January 28, 1923, the Board employed similar narratives, practices, and images in order to illustrate how its building, and by extension, its aspiration for public Protestantism, received divine sanction. While the *Advocate* spreads featured the Methodist Building itself prominently, the cornerstone ceremony focused on physical construction site. These spatial discussions about the building and the lot overlap, of course, but also illustrate the different strategies the Board members adopted to articulate the space's significance. According to the *Voice* reports from the cornerstone-laying ceremony, Wilson used his remarks to contend that this location in Washington, D.C.—square 726—was divinely set aside for the Methodists to erect a building. As he reflected on his initial encounter with the empty lot at Maryland Avenue and First Street NE, Wilson described the experience as being oddly pulled to the spot: “But one day when I passed this triangle, I stopped as though rooted to the spot by the connection that this was the place where such a building should be erected.” He continued, saying, “I was reared Methodist, but I am Presbyterian enough to believe that this spot was foreordained from the beginning of the world to be the center of every good movement in Washington.” Wilson’s comment contained a joke about Methodist and Presbyterian theological differences over free will and predestination to claim that the Board was fulfilling a divine plan by building on this urban lot.³⁵ As Wilson’s joke hints, the narrative of a space being divinely set aside for the Board was largely not consistent with Methodist history or

Society legal documents, volume 1, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

³⁵“Cornerstone of Methodist Building at Nation’s Capital Is Laid,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, February 1923.

theology, but such a narrative about property being set aside for the Board lent religious meaning to the Board's quest for property.

In the *Voice* article on the cornerstone ceremony, the author, likely Deets Pickett who served as the periodical's editor and penned many of the *Voice*'s essays without bylines, suggested that the Board's actions of building on the plot of land earned divine favor. The article reported that when Bishop McDowell formally laid the cornerstone in place, the skies opened up on an overcast winter day and the sun shone down on the ceremony. "As Bishop McDowell placed the copper box in the cornerstone, the rain clouds parted and the sun touched the act with benevolent glory." In no unsubtle language, the *Voice* asserted that the laying of the cornerstone received divine sanction. To the MEC ministers who read the *Voice*, this scene would likely be a familiar one: the image of the clouds parting and light shining down appears in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament in moments of divine intercession. In the story of Noah and the flood, the writer of Genesis reports a rainbow appeared as the symbol of God's promise with humankind not to ever send such destruction again. In the Gospels, both the writers of Matthew and Mark describe how the "heavens opened" after John the Baptist baptized Jesus. In the Gospel story, the Holy Spirit descends as a dove and a voice calls out saying "this is my son with whom I am well pleased."³⁶ In both stories, the writers use the images of light and the clouds parting as symbols of a divine covenant with humanity and a fulfillment or reminder of a prophecy. Though the author of the *Voice* article did not equate the laying of the Methodist Building cornerstone with either of these biblical events, his use of the clouds parting would likely be an allusion MEC ministers would catch. And like the events in the Genesis and Gospels, the *Voice* author desired to interpret the cornerstone ceremony as having divine

³⁶ Genesis 9:12-17; Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1: 9-10.

sanction, perhaps even suggesting the construction of the Methodist Building was the fulfillment of a prophecy or a covenant made when the lot was divinely set aside, as Wilson recounted.³⁷

With Wilson's narrative, the Board's mission to promote Protestant Christian morality in the nation's capital received divine blessing, as the space itself, square 726, had been set aside by God for the MEC Board. The next step for the Board was to explain how it planned to use the space to advance public Protestantism. At the ceremony, Bishop McDowell, the President of the Board, placed a small, copper box inside the white cornerstone. According to the *Voice*, inside the copper box were a Bible, an American flag, Prohibition laws, and documents about the Board, items of material culture that exemplified how the Board understood the building's mission to promote public Protestantism. By planting these objects inside the cornerstone, McDowell moved beyond the rhetorical statements and visually demonstrated the Board's identity as a denominational temperance and Prohibition organization sent to Washington to advocate for Protestant "public morals." This act reminded those present that Prohibition was quite literally the foundation for the Board's headquarters, the place where the Board would continue to advocate for similar morality laws grounded in Protestant Christianity. "We lay this stone in an abiding belief in the sanctity of law and the necessity of public morals," McDowell said, at the cornerstone-laying ceremony, explaining that the goal of the Board's new Methodist Building was not to be antagonistic toward the federal government, but as the latest *Advocate* spread demonstrated on Prohibition, work cooperatively with government officials to promote public morality.³⁸

The location of square 726—across from the Capitol Building—also played prominently

³⁷ "Cornerstone of Methodist Building at Nation's Capital Is Laid," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, February 1923.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

in crafting religious significance at the cornerstone ceremony. Much like the two *Advocate* spreads that featured the Methodist Building alongside the Capitol Building and other recognizable Washington landmarks, the cornerstone-laying ceremony also emphasized the location. In the ceremony, Board leaders like Wilson and McDowell used the proximity of the Capitol Building to the Methodist Building in order to demonstrate how they hoped to influence national affairs; in effect, they offered a visual illustration of the Board's public Protestantism. The U.S. Capitol Building—originally called “Congress Hall”—was the symbolic center of Washington, since Pierre L'Enfant's original 1791 plan for the city created a street grid radiating from the Capitol as its terminus.³⁹ The selection of this location illustrated the Board's public aspiration for national influence, positioning itself as close to the city's center of power as geographically possible.

One particular drawing of the Methodist Building dramatized the Board's mission “to create a Christian public sentiment.” This drawing, produced by the Ballinger Company, which was printed alongside the *Voice* article about the cornerstone-laying ceremony, features the Methodist Building dominating the foreground, while in the background on the left side is the dome of the U.S. Capitol. The drawing illustrated how the Board understood its building's purpose. The drawing, from the perspective of the southern side of Maryland Avenue, featured the Methodist Building prominently, a five-story white stone building with lush, verdant lawns in the front. A car is parked on the street, the same side as the building, with a couple walking up towards the building. Another man stands at the corner, admiring the building, while further in the distance, on First Street a carload of people drive by the building and others look from across the street, on the Capitol Lawn. Yet what is so significant about this drawing is that the Capitol

³⁹ Berg, *Grand Avenues*, 78–103.

dome is perfectly in line with the Methodist Building, creating the visual impression that the Methodist Building looks down upon and surveys the U.S. Capitol. This drawing not only shows the architectural harmony between the Capitol and the Methodist Building that newspapers covering the cornerstone ceremony described; it also visually illustrates the oversight and influence in government that public Protestantism implies, and that Wilson and McDowell hoped the Board would exert upon Congress.⁴⁰



Figure 2.5 “A New Building for the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals,” Board of Temperance: N, Clarence True Wilson Collection, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

⁴⁰ “Cornerstone of Methodist Building in Nation’s Capital is Laid,” *The Voice*, February 1923. “New Building for the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals” circa 1923, Board of Temperance: N, Wilson Collection, Methodist Collection - Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

The Building Dedication, January 1924

Dedication Service

If the cornerstone-laying ceremony used drawings, material culture, and Biblical allusion to express the public Protestantism that the Board hoped to exert through the Methodist Building, the dedication service in January 1924 discussed the Board's aspirations for public influence through a connection to the legacy of Prohibition. In so doing, the dedication demonstrated how the new Methodist Building concretized the Board's mission to shape federal morality laws from a Protestant perspective. Like the *Christian Advocate* spread, which showcased endorsements from prominent government officials who supported Prohibition, the dedication service featured elected officials and other Protestant Prohibition advocates as speakers and invited guests. The Governor of Pennsylvania, Republican Gifford Pinochot, whose 1922 gubernatorial campaign championed Prohibition enforcement, offered congratulatory remarks at the dedication, lauding the MEC Board for its persistent fight against alcohol. The flamboyant three-time Democratic presidential candidate and former Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan followed Pinochot's remarks. Bryan, who had campaigned for the Eighteenth Amendment after he retired from the State Department, complimented the MEC for prioritizing Prohibition. In Bryan's estimation, the focus on Prohibition had spared the Methodists from the brunt of the bitter doctrinal debates between Fundamentalists and Modernists that paralyzed other denominations. (Such a claim overlooked, of course, the North-South schism in American Methodism.)⁴¹

President Calvin Coolidge regretted that he was unable to attend, but Bishop McDowell read his letter aloud at the dedication. Coolidge congratulated the Board for completing a structure "for

⁴¹ Clarence True Wilson, "The Acorn That Grew to Be an Oak: 13th Annual Report of the General Secretary," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, January 1924, 1–2, 5.

the promotion of public morals in the broadest fashion.” Though he never mentioned Prohibition explicitly, his letter reflected the assumption that Prohibition marked the beginning of Protestant cultural values informing government policy. He wrote that the Methodist Building “will visualize to all here in the nation’s capital the definite and concrete aim to maintain our institutions on the firm moral basis upon which the founders intended them to stand.”⁴²

Coolidge’s remarks not only described the key concepts of public Protestantism, but also exemplified the symbolic way the Board invoked Prohibition when discussing the Methodist Building. His letter highlighted the Board’s aspiration that Prohibition would serve as the foundation for subsequent work on promoting Protestant “public morals” beyond just alcohol consumption. His words echoed McDowell’s actions at the cornerstone ceremony, when the Bishop laid Prohibition laws and the Board’s constitution inside the cornerstone. Both men’s actions suggest that they saw Prohibition as the start of a new era of Protestant leadership in shaping American public life, a recurring theme at the dedication service. To make this connection even more clear, the Board selected January 16, 1924 as the date of the dedication, which was the fourth anniversary of the enactment of national Prohibition.⁴³ The selection of this date symbolically connected the Methodist Building with Prohibition, the Board’s founding mission that first brought the Board to Washington.

The invocation of Prohibition at the building dedication represented another effort to situate the Methodist Building within the landscape of Washington, D.C. The dedication, which was organized as a service of worship, helped to bolster the claims for Protestant leadership in

⁴² Calvin Coolidge to William Fraser McDowell, letter, January 12, 1924, Correspondence on Registration for a National Landmark, 1924-1975, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁴³ Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals, ed., “The Dedication of the Methodist Building,” pamphlet, January 16, 1924, Board of Temperance: N, Wilson Collection; “Cornerstone of Methodist Building in Nation’s Capital is Laid,” *The Voice*, February 1923.

American government, therefore expanding upon the efforts of McDowell and Wilson at cornerstone-laying ceremony a year earlier. To do so at the dedication, the Board adapted the basic structure and language of the MEC “Form for the dedication of a Church” from the MEC’s book of worship, *Services and Prayers for Church and Home*. It crafted a dedication service for the Methodist Building that celebrated how Protestantism shaped American democracy and culture. Both the ways the Methodist Building dedication resembled and deviated from this order of worship are instructive. The order of worship recommended reading 2 Chronicles 6 in the Hebrew Bible, when King Solomon built a temple for the Ark of the Covenant. The Board instead chose to craft a responsive setting that pulled from the Psalms and the Book of Revelation.⁴⁴ The excerpts from the Psalms, which began the responsive reading, first contrasted the unchanging permanence of the “city of God” to the ephemeral “heathen” earthly kingdoms. It then contrasted the wickedness of the world with God’s righteousness, encouraging the readers to follow the laws of God: “Commit thy way unto the Lord; Trust also in him, and he shall bring to pass,” as Psalm 37 stated.⁴⁵ And instead of using the recommended selection from Hebrews 10 in the New Testament, which compares Jesus Christ as the “new covenant,” the Board chose to use a selection from Revelation 21, in which the writer prophesies a vision of the New Jerusalem:

Leader: And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. And I, John, a holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Congregation: And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them

⁴⁴Wilbur Patterson Thirkield, *Service and Prayers for Church and Home* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1918), 273–274; Responsive Sentences in “Dedication of the Methodist Building,” 4–5, Wilson Collection.

⁴⁵ Psalm 37; Responsive Sentences in “Dedication of the Methodist Building,” 4–5, Wilson Collection.

which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there.⁴⁶

The parallelism in this litany portrayed Washington, D.C. differently than in traditional portrayals in American civil religion. Rather than celebrating Washington as a sacred city for the nation, this selection recounted the prophesy of the wickedness of the earthly kingdoms falling down to permanence of the city of God. The allusion achieved here provided the textual parallelism often featured in Christian services of worship. By analogy, the litany likened the opening of the Methodist Building to the inauguration of the “new heaven and the new earth.” The parallel, then, implied that without the Methodist Building, Washington, D.C. was not the New Jerusalem, but a wicked, earthy kingdom; with the public Protestantism that the Methodist Building represented however, Washington, D.C. had the potential to be redeemed and become the new heaven and the new earth. By selecting these scripture passages at the dedication, the Board suggested that the Methodist Building would help fulfill the millennial task of bringing in a new heaven and a new earth.

While the “Responsive Sentences” used Scripture to allude indirectly to the religious purpose the Board envisioned for the Methodist Building, the prayers in the dedication service endorsed the assumption in public Protestantism that Protestants had the right to govern. Again, both the Board’s departures from and continuity with the Methodist order of worship for the “Dedication of a Church” proved critical. The choice to adapt the order of worship for consecrating a church indicated that the Board regarded its office and apartment building similar to the gothic revival churches that Methodists constructed in the early twentieth century. Both

⁴⁶ Responsive Sentences in “Dedication of the Methodist Building,” 5, Wilson Collection; Revelation 21: 1-2, 23-27.

the church building and the structure of the order worship emphasize the respectable, establishment identity of Methodism in American culture. Both the prayers opened with a statement of humility (“we acknowledge we are not worthy to offer unto thee anything belonging unto us”), yet petitioned “graciously accept the dedication of this place to thy service,” and both closed with a plea that God’s spirit would inhabit the space.⁴⁷ The prayer of dedication for churches served as the model for the dedication prayer for the Methodist Building, using some of the same sentences and phrases, only swapping “building” in lieu of “place.”⁴⁸ One instance of where the dedication prayer for the Methodist Building started with language from the format prayer and then deviated is particularly illustrative:

And now, Oh Lord, arise and come into this building, Thou and the Art of Thy strength. Give wisdom and vision to all plans made here. Give courage and judgment to all who shall labor here thru the years. Here and elsewhere may Thy servants always perform a service acceptable to Thee... We give this building to Thee this day that we may help to increase and promote under the flag that righteousness that exalteth a nation and we ask Thee for the sake of Jesus Christ to give to the efforts of Thy servants, thru all the years the favor of men and Thine own everlasting blessing.⁴⁹

In this excerpt, at the conclusion of the prayer, the first sentence is identical to the format for the “Dedication of a Church,” but the following sentences were original. The added language allowed the Board to describe its building’s purpose as religious.⁵⁰

The deviations from the original Prayer of Dedication enabled the Board to illustrate the prophetic role it envisioned for the Methodist Building to transform by asserting Protestant morality. Another section of the prayer referenced the location of the Methodist Building when asking for blessings and guidance for elected officials. It stated:

⁴⁷ Thirkield, *Service and Prayers for Church and Home*, 275–276.

⁴⁸ For example: “Oh Lord, arise and come into this building [place], Thou and the Ark of Thy Strength...”

⁴⁹ Prayer of Dedication in “Dedication of the Methodist Building,” 7, Wilson Collection.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Help us to make the welfare of all the supreme law of the land, and to establish the throne of Christ in all the earth. Under the shadow of the Capitol's dome we beseech Thee, Oh God, to bless Thy servant the President of the United States, all Governors of all States, Congress, and all legislatures, the Supreme Court and all courts in every place, all officers of law everywhere. Fill them with the spirit of wisdom, goodness, and truth so rule in their hearts and deeds that law and order, righteousness and justice shall everywhere prevail.⁵¹

This section of the prayer, with its allusion to the Methodist Building “under the shadow of the Capitol's dome,” echoed the earlier drawings of the Methodist Building and explained that its location was integral to the religious purpose the building occupied. The language also made clear that the Board believed how Protestants had the right to shape laws. The prayer, which followed the Responsive Sentences, made clear to the attendees of the service that the Board intended to use the Methodist Building to exercise influence over American government based upon an explicit Protestant identity.⁵²

Meetings

Between January and February 1924, MEC periodicals printed the itinerary of the January 15 and 16 dedication events for readers, including the remarks of McDowell, Bryan,

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *The Methodist Hymnal: The Official Hymnal of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1905), 703, 712. The hymn choices also embraced themes of civic righteousness of the public Protestantism that the Board embraced for the Methodist Building. The first hymn, “From all the dwell below the skies” written by Isaac Watts included the lines “Let the Redeemer's name be sung/ Through every land, by every tongue,” further emphasizing the theme of national righteousness. The second and the third hymns sung at the middle and end of the service, respectively, each came from the section of the MEC *Hymnal* entitled “National Occasions.” The second hymn, “Our thought of thee is glad with hope,” was sung after the Responsive Sentences and included lines about the trials of the nation and hope that future children may live in peace and virtue. This hymn, which was written by John Greenleaf Whittier, a Quaker and member of the American Anti-Slavery Society, reflected Wilson's nostalgia for the Protestant reform efforts of the Second Great Awakening. And the final hymn, sung immediately after the patriotic Prayer of Dedication, explicitly channeled themes of public Protestantism and patriotism. The hymn, “God bless our native land,” which appeared in the *Hymnal* immediately after “My Country Tis of Thee,” and is set to the same melody.⁵²

Wilson, and Coolidge's letter of congratulations. To the Methodists reading about the dedication from a distance, the media coverage helped MEC members reconstruct the events of the dedication and taught readers that the new Methodist Building would sit at the center of national prominence in Washington.⁵³ Yet media coverage also included reports about the Board meetings held concurrently with dedication events. In the midst of the pageantry and celebration, the Board's managers and staff occupied the rooms of the Methodist Building to do the more mundane work of attending to the Board's operations and governance.⁵⁴ Meeting for the first time in the new Methodist Building was partially a practical matter, as Board managers would have been coming to Washington for the dedication Service already, but the minutes explain that this was a deliberate choice. The January 15 and 16, 1924 Board meetings actually represented the Board's 1923 annual meeting. Usually held in early December, the managers voted in December 1922 that "any unfinished was left in the care of the Executive Committee," and when the resumed meeting in January 1924, the Board received the staff reports from the interim year.⁵⁵

The act of holding a meeting in the Methodist Building concurrent with its dedication therefore helped to emphasize the importance of the building spaces for accomplishing the Board's religious mission. Much like the urban mainline Protestant Institutional Churches, which

⁵³ "Cornerstone of Methodist Building in Nation's Capital is Laid," *The Voice*, February 1923; "Dedication Week in Washington," *Christian Advocate*, January 10, 1924: 54; Wilson, "The Acorn That Grew to Be an Oak: 13th Annual Report of the General Secretary," and Pickett, "The Eleventh Annual Report of the Research Secretary," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, January 1924.

⁵⁴ "Methodists to Meet: Delegates Will Arrive Today for Dry Session," *Washington Evening Star*, January 14, 1924; "Bishop to Dedicate Methodist Building: Many Expected to Attend," *Baltimore Sun*, January 12, 1924.

⁵⁵ Annual meeting minutes, December 5, 1922 page 3, annual meeting (1923) minutes, January 15, 1924, pages 1, 6, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

included gymnasiums, libraries, classrooms, and other physical rooms that enabled liberal Protestants to apply the teachings of the church to contemporary social life, the spatial arrangement of the Methodist Building, in this case offices and meeting rooms, enabled the Board to implement its mission to “relate the principles of the gospel of Christ to the economical [*sic*], political, industrial and social relations of life, and which will crystalize all oppositions of the moral law.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, the act of meeting emphasized the building’s *Methodist* identity. As Methodist studies scholars including Doan, Hempton, Wigger, and Russell Richey explain, small, intimate, and frequent meetings characterized early Methodist communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Because of this practice of meetings, including class meetings, camp meetings, and love feasts, scholars including Richey and Doan observed that Methodist worship practices were corporate, communal, and social.⁵⁷ It would be anachronistic and inaccurate to contend Board meetings were early twentieth century versions of these earlier meeting practices—Board meetings were primarily business meetings, not worship gatherings, and Methodists had settled into an established denomination since the mid-nineteenth century. However, the history of Methodist meetings does point to continuity of corporate gatherings in self-consciously Methodist spaces. That the media coverage of the dedication recounted the Board meeting in addition to the dedication service also demonstrated how the practice of meeting in the Methodist

⁵⁶ Aaron Ignatius Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1962), 137, 164; Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 186–198; Matthew Bowman, *The Urban Pulpit: New York City and the Fate of Liberal Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 128–129; annual meeting (1923) minutes, January 15, 1924, page 4, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁵⁷ Doan, “Worship, Experience, and the Creation of Methodist Place,” 36–59; Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism*, 16; Hempton, *Methodism Empire of the Spirit*, 78–79; Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 48–79.

Building would realize the Board's mission and emphasized the specifically Methodist character of the space.⁵⁸

The practice of holding meetings in the Methodist Building began on Tuesday afternoon, the day before the new building's dedication, when the managers and the staff assembled in the conference room on the building's first floor. In the dark wood-paneled room, managers sat in the new leather chairs as staff members delivered reports.⁵⁹ After taking attendance, Wilson delivered a lengthy General Secretary's Report. In previous years, Wilson addressed the current state of Board affairs, Prohibition laws, and briefly mentioned his aspirations for a headquarters for the organization. In his report delivered that January, Wilson adopted a different approach, outlining the entire history of the Board from its inception as the Church Temperance Society of the MEC in 1904, Wilson assuming leadership of the organization as General Secretary in 1910, and the cramped one-room office in Chicago the Society first occupied. He talked about his campaigns for prohibition in western states, traveling, speaking, petitioning, and producing leaflets on prohibition. Wilson concluded his report with the construction of the Methodist Building, what he saw as the fulfillment of the Board's identity.

After the dedication service and reception had concluded the following day, the Board managers once again convened to hold a meeting. This time, the Board met on the second floor, in Bishop McDowell's office. Photographs suggest the room was a modest one with a desk and a long, leather couch.⁶⁰ McDowell, as chair, would have likely sat at his desk while staff and

⁵⁸ "Dedication Week in Washington," *Christian Advocate*, January 10, 1924: 54; Wilson, "The Acorn That Grew to Be an Oak," and Pickett, "The Eleventh Annual Report of the Research Secretary," *The Voice*, January 1924.

⁵⁹ Annual meeting (1923) minutes, January 15, 1924, page 2, Minutes, 1912-1933; Shaw-Walker Company to Board, letter, June 28, 1923, Board of Temperance - Building Specifications and Furnishings, 1922-1923, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁶⁰ "Office of the Resident Bishop," in Photograph: New Methodist Building, Washington, D.C.,

managers may have crowded around the couch and stood wherever. After celebrating the anniversary of national Prohibition in the symbolism and ritual of the dedication service, the Board began addressing contemporary issues in public morals and Prohibition enforcement. First, however, the Board passed a resolution commending Wilson and McDowell for their work on the Methodist Building, “the realization of a dream latent in the mind of the Church.” Then, the Board turned to discussing issues of Prohibition enforcement, and passed resolutions to call for the transfer of the Prohibition Unit from the authority of the IRS to an independent bureau in order “for an increased efficiency in administration of the law.” The Board also adopted resolutions encouraging the “deportation of alien bootleggers” and the greater cooperation between the U.K. and U.S. “to suppress rum smuggling.” After endorsing such policies on Prohibition, the Board turned its attention to other so-called “public morals,” such as advocating for a Department of Education for “the abolition of illiteracy” and the “rehabilitation of public schools,” a veiled anti-Catholic reference.⁶¹ It further adopted positions in support of “just and uniform regulation of marriage and divorce laws,” proposed Congress regulate gambling through its powers to regulate interstate commerce, called for a reduction of immigration based on 1890 levels, and declared that “lynching is murder” and praised “Christian people throughout the country on the awakening conscience of the country with regard to this sin.”⁶²

The resolutions passed by the Board at its inaugural meeting in the building—and the language it used in crafting them—illustrate how the Board’s definitions of “public morals”

undated, Wilson Collection.

⁶¹ For more on the history of Catholic-Protestant fights over public schools, see: Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 60–83.

⁶² Annual meeting (1923) minutes, January 15, 1924, pages 8-11, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

implied an overt white Protestant cultural centrality. By calling for a reduction of immigration to 1890 levels, the Board endorsed the white supremacism behind the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, passed that May. The Johnson-Reed Act favored whiteness in immigration law by imposing harsh restrictions on immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, which historian Matthew Frye Jacobson explains were not considered white like Northern European immigrants; the law's preference for white immigrants is also evident in its outright ban of immigration from Asian countries.⁶³ As legal scholar Jayesh M. Rathod argues, the Board's advocacy of immigration restrictions was consistent with decades of Prohibition and temperance advocates who used rhetoric of alcohol consumption and drunkenness to racialize immigrants and nonwhite people. By advocating for the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act and making claims about the alcohol consumption patterns of immigrant groups, the Board's mission of public Protestantism was indelibly marked by whiteness.⁶⁴

Interior Spaces: The Methodist Building as a Christian Home

The interior spaces of the Methodist Building—and the activities that occurred within those rooms—became another means through which the Board attributed religious significance to its new building. If the exterior of the building expressed the Board's public Protestantism, the interior expressed domestic Protestantism. The Board and MEC media portrayed the interior spaces in softer, more domestic language as “a safe, homelike headquarters.”⁶⁵ The *Christian Advocate* described “a hospitable welcome at the new headquarters building,” including a

⁶³ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁶⁴ Jayesh M. Rathod, “Distilling Americans: The Legacy of Prohibition on U.S. Immigration Law,” *Houston Law Review* 51, no. 3 (January 1, 2014): 781–846.

⁶⁵ “Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals,” *Yearbook of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1923: 179.

“beautiful columned lobby.”⁶⁶ Such a description of the Methodist Building is the product of a history of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mainline Protestant religious architecture and material culture, in which white mainline Protestants conceptualized the home as the space of domestic religion. Historian of religion Colleen McDannell explained that in the nineteenth century, under Horace Bushnell’s liberalizing theology, Protestants envisioned the home as the private side to the Second Great Awakening’s benevolent associations, where mothers would provide religious instruction to children and by raising a family, help craft the moral fabric of the nation. The white Protestant Victorian home therefore borrowed from gothic revival architecture, which was popular in churches at the time, including vaulted arches, bay windows, and images from nature, like flowers and trees. Withdrawn from public space, the Victorian Christian home evoked sentiment, emotion, and imagination. The Victorian Christian home also made the Bible, an integral piece of material culture in churches, a central piece of the home space, where mothers would record vital details of family life.⁶⁷ Historian of religion Jean Halgren Kilde explains that by the end of the nineteenth century, the home as the center for Christian piety had become such a commonplace theme that Protestants adopted domestic material culture and language for churches. The large Protestant churches built in this period not only featured gothic revival style exteriors and auditorium-like sanctuaries, but increasingly modeled interior rooms of the church after middle-class Victorian homes. Rooms in churches took the names of rooms of the home, such as the nursery, kitchen, library, or parlor. Décor also mimicked the home, employing similar natural themes and symbols, using stained, dark wood carved with natural

⁶⁶ “Methodists Visiting Washington,” *Christian Advocate*, January 17, 1924: 62.

⁶⁷ Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 101.

images like leaves and flowers. Homes first borrowed the décor and symbolism of churches; churches later adopted the décor and symbols in the domestic space.⁶⁸

The interior spaces of the Methodist Building borrowed some of the same material culture and architectural styles that McDannell observed in the white Protestant Victorian home and Kilde in nineteenth-century Protestant churches. Much like the language and symbolism of public Protestantism that characterized building's exterior even before completion, the practice of describing the interior of the Methodist Building as domestic space occurred when it was still under construction. In the 1923 *Yearbook of the MEC* (which recounted developments within the MEC for the previous year), Pickett or Wilson wrote that when completed, the Methodist Building would be a "safe, homelike headquarters," where Methodist young people visiting Washington, D.C. could check luggage, use washrooms, and access the reading room.⁶⁹ The first-floor lobby which would be "a great reception room...that should be furnished and equipped for the convenience of guests," balanced both the domesticity and the public mission of the Methodist Building.⁷⁰ The ovular shaped lobby featured white marble floors and black columns, with blind arches in the walls, echoing the neo-classical style of other Washington building and in "keeping with its public character."⁷¹ At the same time, the furnishings of the lobby ensured it evoked the "homelike" intimacy of a middle-class Victorian Christian home and churches. Pairs of sofas and chairs, each carved from solid walnut with wool tapestry upholstery

⁶⁸ Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 152–153.

⁶⁹ "Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals," *Yearbook of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1923: 179.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ballinger Company, "New Building for the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals of the Methodist Episcopal Church," circa 1922, Board of Temperance: N, Wilson Collection; James M. Goode, *Best Addresses: A Century of Washington's Distinguished Apartment Houses* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 226.

filled the room, alongside walnut side tables, and blue silk floor lamps.⁷² Such objects embraced a material Christianity similar to the Victorian Christian home and mainline Protestant churches, evoking intimate, sentimental places for gathering that offering a reprieve from the public pressures of political life on Capitol Hill.

The rooms and objects of material culture in the Methodist Building bore resemblance to the Victorian Christian home, but such a domestic spatial arrangement was not part of the Methodist Building's original plan. An earlier iteration of the first-floor plan for the building by Walter Ballinger's firm proposed a more commercial first floor for the Methodist Building, far less domestic than the final product. The blueprint ultimately used to construct the Methodist Building shows a central entrance to the V-shaped building. This grand entrance, at the corner of Maryland Avenue and First Street, opened into an expansive lobby that evenly bisected each side of the building's V-shape. A previous blueprint produced by the Ballinger firm featured no central entryway at the vertex of the V. Instead, there were entrances on each of the building's two sides, two on First Street and one on Maryland Avenue. A pedestrian entering the Methodist Building on First Street would walk left to enter the tea room, and right to enter the Book Store before even encountering the elevator lobby. The Maryland Avenue entrance opened to a hallway of offices. No central lobby existed in this plan. Under the revised plan, Ballinger's final blueprint for the first floor reflected the Board's aspirations to evoke a domestic interior in the Methodist Building. The central entrance made the first floor much more open, offering an inviting space for guests, and the lobby replaced the bookstore, which was moved to the

⁷² "A corner of the lobby," in Photograph: New Methodist Building, Washington, D.C., undated, Wilson Collection; Shaw-Walker Company to Board, letter, June 28, 1923, Board of Temperance - Building Specifications and Furnishings, 1922-1923, GBCS Administrative Records.

Maryland Avenue side alongside offices. In lieu of a store on the First Street side, the modified plan contained a conference room, a room with dark paneled wood walls and leather chairs for groups to meet, and a tea room and kitchen.⁷³ Photos of the dining room featured small, intimate four-person Windsor style tables in elegant, yet affordable enamel.⁷⁴

The varied rooms on the first floor and the offices on the second were not where the similarities to Protestant architecture ended. The residential apartments on the third through fifth floors of the Methodist Building also bore resemblance to the dormitories in urban YMCA buildings, reflecting a combination of domesticity, leisure, commerce and evangelical Protestant Christianity present in urban YMCA buildings. Instead of offering a muscular Christianity to a class of unattached urban bachelors, the Methodist Building's interior spaces reflected their appeal to the people who frequented Capitol Hill: Congressmen, Senators, and members of the executive branch. Wilson described the building's apartments, ranging from studios without a kitchen to two-bedroom units, as "designed to appeal to a very desirable class of Senators and Congressmen and others, so that it is anticipated they will be a considerable source of revenue."⁷⁵ Furnished in the same style of décor as the foyer, the apartments featured warm, rich upholstered sofas and armchairs. Drapes hung over the windows, and in at least one apartment, a fireplace gave the space added warmth.⁷⁶ Though the Capitol Hill clientele to whom the apartments catered differed from the single urban youth who stayed in YMCAs and YWCAs,

⁷³ Ballinger and Perrot Architects, "First Floor Plan," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, September 1920; Ballinger Company, "First Story Plan," blueprint, September 25, 1922, Methodist Building - Blueprints and Floorplans, undated, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁷⁴ "The dining room," in Photograph: New Methodist Building, Washington, D.C., undated, Wilson Collection.

⁷⁵ Ballinger Company, "New Building," 3, Wilson Collection.

⁷⁶ Photograph: New Methodist Building, Washington, D.C., undated, Wilson Collection.

they shared a similar purpose: both represented domestic spaces, sheltering people from the dangers of urban life.⁷⁷

The material culture of the Methodist Building frequently married the dual themes of the Christian home and public Protestantism. One booklet, published sometime in 1924, illustrated how the Board merged those two distinct themes. The twenty-page booklet contains only two pages of printed text, with the remaining eighteen pages consisting of building photos. The booklet opens with the same exterior photograph that had previously been published in the *Voice* and *Christian Advocate*. The center two pages of the booklet featured a spread of five photographs of federal government buildings nearby the Methodist Building. Arranged in a V shape with a large photo of the U.S. Capitol Building placed at the bottom center of the spread, the Library of Congress and the Post Office were placed to the Capitol's upper left, and the Senate Office Building and Union Station were positioned on its upper right. The caption below read, "The Methodist Building faces the Senate wing of the Capitol and is just across the street from the Senate Office Building." Like the *Christian Advocate* spreads before the cornerstone ceremony in January 1923, this section of the booklet conveys Methodism's establishment identity by portraying how the Methodist Building sits at the center of power in Washington, D.C. This photo booklet served as another visual reminder to readers that the Board hoped to embody its aspirations of public Protestantism in the Methodist Building.⁷⁸

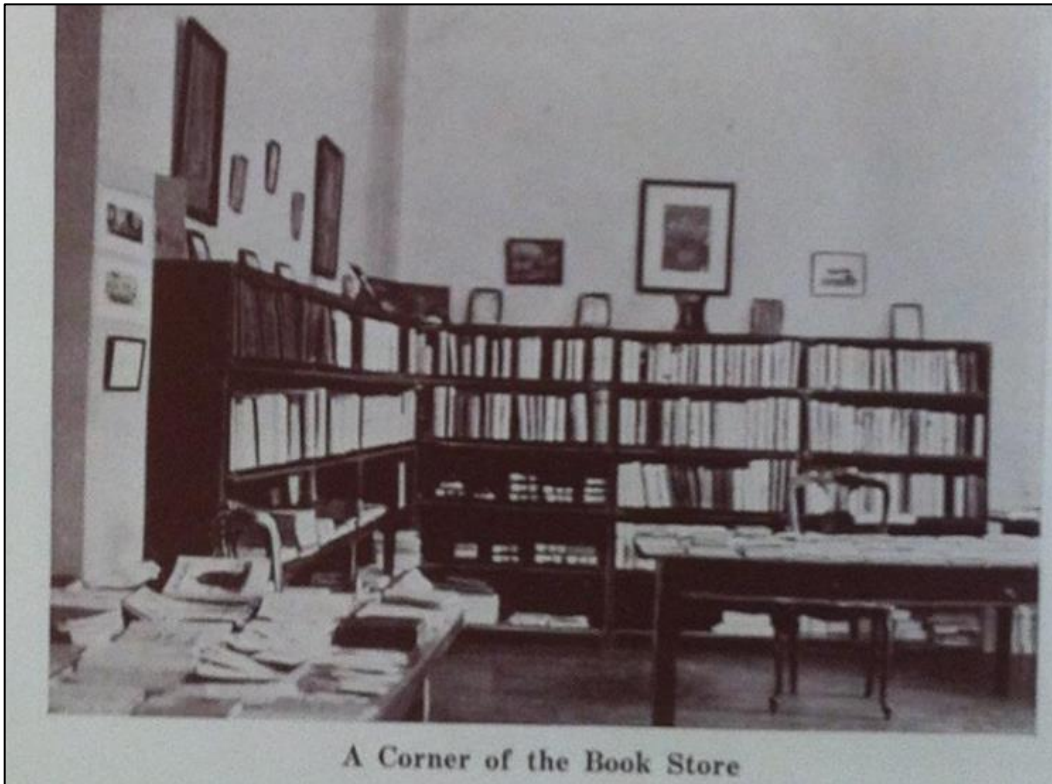
At the same time this document stressed the Board's public Protestantism by featuring the exterior of the building, the booklet also displayed the building's domestic Protestantism

⁷⁷ Paula Lupkin, *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making of Modern Urban Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁷⁸ Centerfold in Photograph: New Methodist Building, Washington, D.C., undated, Wilson Collection.

through illustrations of its interior. As if providing a photographic tour to viewers, the booklet followed the photo of the Methodist Building exterior with photos of the first-floor interior rooms, including the lobby, conference room, and dining room. After the two-page spread of Washington buildings, the booklet featured Wilson's, McDowell's, and Pickett's offices, as well as other offices in the Building, the bookstore, and the mailing department. Its final page featured a photo of a furnished apartment unit. In addition, on one page of narrative text that solicited funds to pay down the building debt, the Board wrote, "The Board's work is essential to your prosperity and the safety of your home," because of its advocacy against alcohol, gambling, and "law defiance."⁷⁹ In combination with the photos of interior rooms, this illustrated how the two missions of the Methodist Building intersected. Through the building on Capitol Hill, the Board hoped to redeem Washington and protect the home.

⁷⁹ "Our Claim on You," in *ibid.*



A Corner of the Book Store



Ladies' Rest Room



The Lobby as viewed from the main doorway



A corner of the lobby

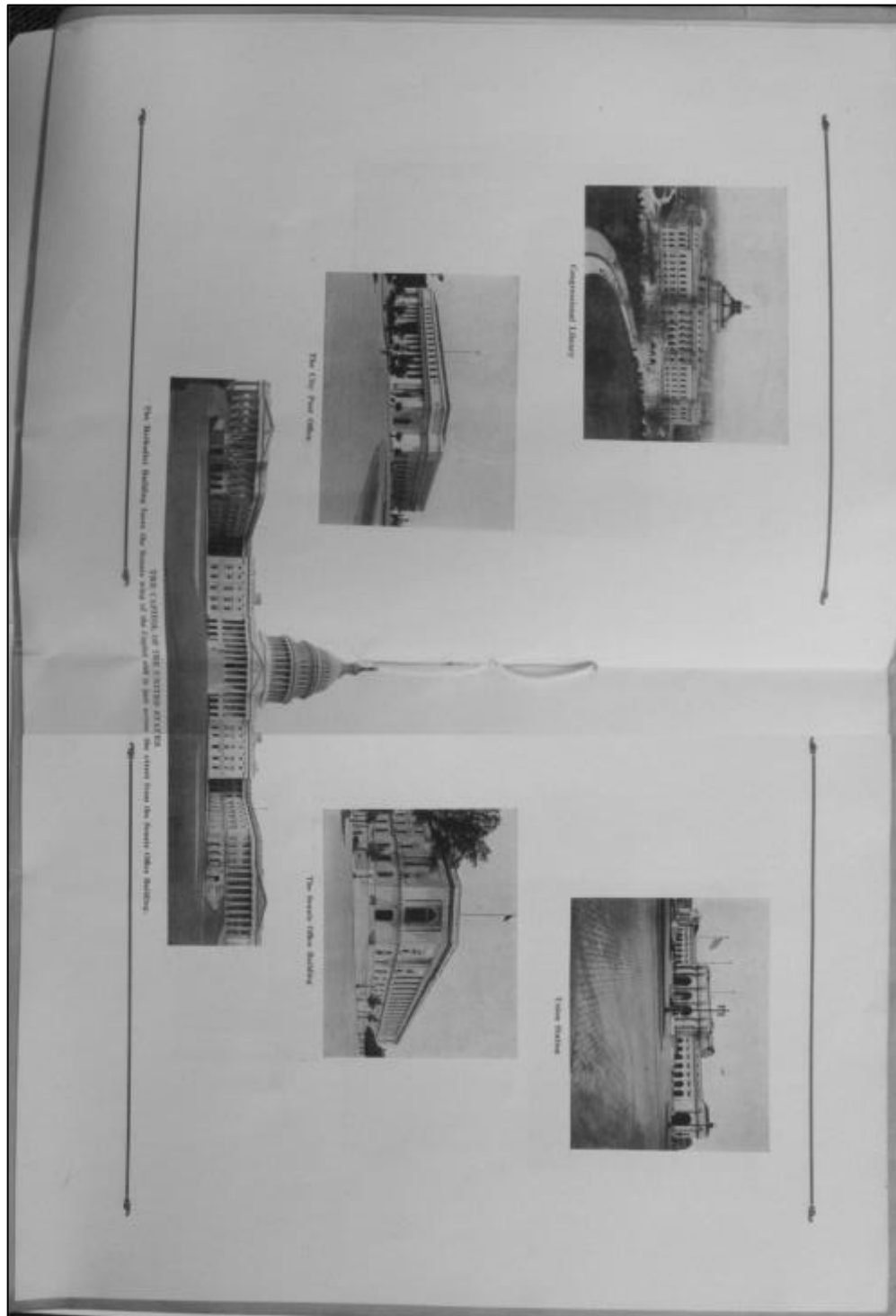


Figure 2.6 Photographs of bookstore, ladies' room, lobby and centerfold from Photograph: New Methodist Building, Washington, D.C., Clarence True Wilson Collection, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

These two themes—protecting the Christian home and influencing the federal government—were not only at the heart of how the Board described the religious significance of the Methodist Building, they were also themes used in fundraising for the building. Like the January 1923 spreads in the *Christian Advocate*, the purpose of this photo booklet was to solicit donations in order to pay down the debt on the Methodist Building. However, the photo booklet differed in one critical way from the earlier *Advocate* spreads. By featuring the now-completed interior, the photo booklet combined the familiar fundraising theme of public Protestantism with the theme of the Christian home. “It is perfectly safe to say that prohibition would not have come to America as soon as it did but for the activities of the Board,” the booklet wrote, touting the Board’s past accomplishments. It continued, “Today, the Board occupies an unchallenged place as the leading champion of civic righteousness against the corruption of the theater and of literature, the spread of soul-destroying gambling evil, and the perversion of sport,” echoing some of the topics the Board addressed at its first meeting in the new building and others it addressed in the *Voice*.⁸⁰ By citing the past achievement of Prohibition, the Board wanted potential donors to be aware of its successful track record in promoting public Protestantism in order to be persuaded that the Methodist Building would be a worthwhile investment for advocating for public morals in American government. The pamphlet conveyed to potential donors that as a “champion of civic righteousness” the Board would entail a transformation of homes and the nation as a whole. In this way, donors quite literally *invested* the Methodist Building with purpose: donations funded the Board’s mission and promoted a greater sense of collective ownership of the Methodist Building on the part of the MEC.

⁸⁰ Introduction in *ibid*.

Building Secretary, Christian Mother: Maude Aiken Wilson

Because the Board likened the Methodist Building to the space of the Christian home, Clarence True Wilson's wife, Maude Aiken Wilson, assumed a leadership role in overseeing the operations of the building. The discourse and practices that cast the Methodist Building as a symbol of the Christian home space allowed for a rather natural opening for Maude Aiken Wilson to assume the role of Building Secretary.⁸¹ Maude's duties as Building Secretary included hiring maintenance staff for the building, screening apartment applicants, overseeing repairs, and monitoring income and expenditures.⁸² If the practices, discourses, and material culture inside the Methodist Building treated the space as a middle-class Victorian Christian home on Capitol Hill, then, as the wife of the General Secretary who conceived of the idea of the Methodist Building, Maude became the Building's symbolic mother. According to McDannell, Victorian Protestant Christianity enabled mothers to occupy an influential role in the religious leadership of the home. Protestant women brought the reformist zeal of the Second Great Awakening into the home space. "Proponents of the sacrality of the home presented the family as the foundation of the nation and of Christianity," McDannell explained. "Mothers thus became crucial in fulfilling America's religious and political destiny."⁸³ Clarence, in his 1913 book *Dry or Die*, supported women's suffrage on the grounds that the home "is the hope of this republic

⁸¹ Clarence True Wilson and Maude Aiken Tift married in Portland, Oregon in 1908. At that time, Wilson was still a parish minister in Portland, before he became secretary of the Temperance Society. Robert Dean McNeil, *Valiant for Truth: Clarence True Wilson and Prohibition: A Story of Prohibition and One of Its Leading Advocates* (Portland, Ore.: Oregonians Concerned about Addiction Problems, 1992), 26–27; marriage record of Clarence True Wilson and Maude Aiken Tift, Multnomah County Marriage Index, 1908 (23): 47.

⁸² Maude Aiken Wilson, "First annual building report," December 1924, page 1, Reports: General Secretary's annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson's annual reports, 1913–1924, Wilson Collection.

⁸³ Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840–1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 43.

and the source of the Christian church.” As “the most sacred institution in this country,” Protestant Christian women had the duty and privilege to exercise their “Christian citizenship” in order to protect the home from vices and sin.⁸⁴ Therefore, as mother of the Methodist Building, Maude’s guardianship of the Methodist Building’s domestic spaces also meant she helped support the Board’s mission of public Protestantism.

Though she did not receive the title of Building Secretary until 1924, her role as mother of the Methodist Building began even before the building opened. At the groundbreaking event in November 1922, Maude accompanied her husband in throwing a ceremonial shovel of dirt. The photo from the event shows both Clarence and Maude with shovels at the event.⁸⁵ No newspapers mentioned Maude appearing alongside her husband, but other photos of the two confirm the resemblance. That Maude participated in the ceremonial shoveling of dirt indicates her symbolic status as the spouse of the General Secretary. The husband and wife duo appear as surrogate mother and father, birthing the Methodist Building together from the dirt of square 726. Maude, who had assisted her husband in various secretarial capacities with the Board since Wilson first began in 1910, was present from the beginning of the Methodist Building.⁸⁶ Within the first year of operation, Maude furnished and decorated the building’s apartments and selected tenants to rent each unit. As indication of how the Board coded building upkeep as feminine work, Maude collaborated with the wives of four other Board members, including Board President Bishop McDowell, Board treasurer William T. Galliher, John C. Letts, and John R.

⁸⁴ Wilson, *Dry or Die*, 209–221.

⁸⁵ “Beginning of Construction of the New Methodist Building at 110 Maryland Avenue NE,” photograph, (Washington, D.C., November 1922), General Photograph Collection, Historical Society of Washington.

⁸⁶ McNeil, *Valiant for Truth*, 50–51.

Edwards, to furnish the first-floor dining room, lobby, conference room and book room. The five women also furnished Board offices and Bishop McDowell's office on the second floor.⁸⁷

Through her role as the building's Christian mother, Maude continued to use her unique, gendered role to play an outsize role in the development of the Methodist Building. Invoices from the company furnishing the Methodist Building bear Maude's signature. This suggests that Maude not only was involved in the traditionally feminine task of selecting décor for rooms, but also the tasks of monitoring expenditures and coordinating deliveries.⁸⁸ When the building was still under design, she took leadership in making decisions on the structure of the building. For example, one letter reveals that the architect, Walter Ballinger, consulted Maude for a final decision on installing a dumbwaiter or a service elevator. Ballinger wrote to Maude, recommending changing the original plan to accommodate a service elevator, but in her reply to Ballinger, she respectfully disagreed, citing space limitations. "I have thought over the matter of the substitution of the service elevator for the dumbwaiters and much prefer the original dumbwaiters," she wrote, not persuaded by Ballinger's projected savings in construction costs. Yet, in her reply, which she signed as "Mrs. Clarence True Wilson," Maude framed her decision on the building design in the context of what would offer the most pleasant living experience for the apartment residents. She envisioned the hallways strewn with garbage cans that needed to be disposed through a service elevator, adding that, "It would be highly undesirable to have the various tradesmen rubbing elbows with our apartment holders and their guests in the elevator

⁸⁷ Wilson, "First annual building report," 2-3, Reports: General Secretary's annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson's annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection.

⁸⁸ A to Z Business Bureau, "Proposed Furniture for the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals," to Board, October 23, 1923, January 10, 1924, Methodist Building - Blueprints and Floorplans, undated, GBCS Administrative Records.

lobbies.”⁸⁹ Such a statement reveals that when making decisions about the building structure, Maude leaned upon logic of residents’ welfare and creating a harmonious household.

Maude’s reply to Ballinger also demonstrated the racial and class assumptions in her understanding of the Methodist Building as a domestic space. Maude’s comments about the operation of the Methodist Building illustrate that the Board had specific, fixed ideas about whiteness and middle-class identity in the Victorian Christian home. If the Building’s apartments were “designed to appeal to a very desirable class of tenants, such as Senators and Congressmen,” Maude did not want service employees and contractors, who would have been less educated, blue collar employees, interacting with residents who were, if not public officials, at least fairly affluent.⁹⁰ According to the 1930 Census, the residents in the Methodist Building apartments held professional class occupations, including one president of a newspaper, a school teacher, an electrical appliances salesperson, and a clerk for the U.S. government. In segregated Washington, Maude’s statement about the separation of workers from residents also implied separation by race as well as class. As historians Jacqueline Moore and Willard B. Gatewood have demonstrated, the black middle class in Washington also adopted Victorian décor and aesthetics in their homes, but Maude restricted her vision of the Methodist Building as a Victorian Christian home to whiteness.⁹¹ Maude’s vision of the Methodist Building as a Christian home did not include crossing of racial boundaries in the domestic spaces, which again

⁸⁹ Walter F. Ballinger to Maude Aiken Wilson, letter, November 11, 1922; Maude Aiken Wilson to Walter F. Ballinger, November 13 1922, Methodist Building - Blueprints and Floorplans, undated, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁹⁰ Ballinger Company, “New Building,” 3, Wilson Collection.

⁹¹ Jacqueline M. Moore, *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation’s Capital, 1880-1920* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999); Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000).

is confirmed by the 1930 census, as all of the residents listed in the apartments are identified as white.⁹² Though it is unclear about a formal policy of segregation at the time, later evidence confirms that Bayard Rustin organized an effort to desegregate the Methodist Building's dining room in the summer of 1947.⁹³

By the time of the building dedication in January 1924, the Board managers formalized Maude's management of the Methodist Building. At their meeting on January 15, the day before the dedication, the Board's treasurer William Galliher moved that Maude "continue her interest in operation of the building, executing if possible the duties of Executive Secretary," granting her the title of Building Secretary and a salary.⁹⁴ Outside of Wilson's personal secretary, this made Maude the first woman on the Board to receive a salary, certainly the first woman in an executive position. The Building Secretary role granted her the ability to deliver reports to the managers at their annual meetings, and reflected some common traits of women's religious leadership, including decorating, screening rental applicants, hiring building staff, monitoring expenses and revenue, and recommending improvements.⁹⁵ Maude continued to frame her duties in the context of Christian motherhood and domesticity. For example, when describing the Methodist Building itself, Maude complimented the housekeeper, "who supervises all cleaning

⁹² "Enumeration District 240 for the Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930," page 7A, lines 23-33. Ancestry.com accessed 2017. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C.

⁹³ "Citizen Group Drafts Interracial Proposal on YMCA Coffee Shop," *Washington Evening Star*, July 25, 1947; memos and letters, July 1947, Management of Cafeteria - Inter-Racial Policy, Records of the General Welfare Division of the General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.
on dining room interracial policy, folder 1477-2-8:28

⁹⁴ Annual meeting (1923) minutes, January 15, 1924, page 6, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁹⁵ Wilson, "First annual building report," December 1924, Reports: General Secretary's annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson's annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection.

and handling of the draperies and furniture and makes even our public building look like a well kept [*sic*] home.”⁹⁶ In that report, given at the 1925 annual meeting, Maude compared the upkeep of the Methodist Building to a home. She also interpreted her duty of selecting apartment applicants in a similar domestic manner, as she told the managers at that meeting, “The 15 families who are tenants in our apartments are a congenial group with such tastes and habits that we have had no embarrassments growing out of acts inconsistent with our building,” using additional classed and racialized language. This statement showed that Maude selected families to be tenants in the Building, and by referring to “acts inconsistent with our building” Maude was likely using a euphemism for drunkenness or alcohol consumption, which defied the Board’s stated mission.⁹⁷

Though Maude Wilson played an important role in working to implement the Board’s vision of the Methodist Building as a domestic home space and office on Capitol Hill, her interior work was characterized as private, and therefore unrecognized outside of Board meetings. The *Voice* reprinted “Mrs. Clarence True Wilson’s” first report as Building Secretary in the December 1924 issue, but this was the exception that proved the rule.⁹⁸ Several months later, in March 1925, the *Voice* provided a narrative tour of the Methodist Building to readers, but the three-page article does not mention Maude’s role as Building Secretary. The only mention of “Mrs. Wilson” occurred when the article discussed the General Secretary’s office where a passerby might observe “Mrs. Wilson as well as Dr. Wilson, hard at work.”⁹⁹ Yet the

⁹⁶ Wilson, “Second annual building report,” December 9, 1925, Reports: General Secretary’s annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson’s annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection.

⁹⁷ Ibid. No leases during this period are present in the archives.

⁹⁸ Maude Aiken Wilson, “The Affairs of the Building: A Report by Mrs. Clarence True Wilson,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, December 1924.

⁹⁹ Clarence True Wilson, “The Story of the Methodist Building in Washington, D.C.,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, March 1925.

most glaring omission of Maude's involvement in the Methodist Building is the same photo booklet discussed previously. With its inclusion of photos of nearly every room in the Methodist Building, the booklet clearly featured her work in furnishing the Building. Each room pictured in the booklet is fully furnished thanks to Maude's leadership, as well as the involvement of other women married to Board members, yet no credit is given. Nor is Maude pictured in the booklet. Her husband, Clarence, and McDowell, were the only two people whose photographs appeared in the booklet, with the titles of General Secretary and President of the Board underneath each, respectively.¹⁰⁰ While Maude, or "Mrs. Wilson," was influential in investing the Methodist Building with the spirit of a Christian home, her domestic role was considerably less important in the public presentations of the Methodist Building to the wider MEC.

Simpson Memorial Chapel: A Space of Public Protestantism and the Christian Home

The Methodist Building's dual identities as a platform for public Protestantism and symbol of the white Protestant Christian home converged in one room: the chapel. This room, added in 1929, also highlighted the different gender roles in the religious work in the Methodist Building. Like the outdoor ceremonies and material culture, the chapel represented a very public celebration of white male leadership while, like Maude's role as Building Secretary, offered a more muted, private recognition of female domestic leadership. Dedicated to honor the legacy of Bishop Matthew Simpson, the Simpson Memorial Chapel celebrated his life as a paragon of a Protestant shaping American democracy, while the space itself yet again evoked the domestic home space with its Victorian furnishings.

As both blueprints and ephemera from its first few years show, a chapel was not part of

¹⁰⁰ Photographs of Wilson and McDowell, in Photograph: New Methodist Building, Washington, D.C., undated, Wilson Collection.

the original plan for the Methodist Building.¹⁰¹ Therefore, the chapel's eventual incorporation into the Methodist Building illustrates the culmination of the Board's efforts to emphasize the religious mission behind the Methodist Building. By the summer of 1928, Maude had overseen the closure of the bookstore on the first floor, stating that the space was too small and that there was need for a larger meeting space. "We could utilize that beautiful room on Maryland Avenue, which is a quiet street, for a chapel, and by removing the partition and adding the next room, we would have nearly double the seating capacity we have," she told the managers at their annual meeting, that December.¹⁰² By the time of her report, work was well underway for renovating the space of the old bookstore into a chapel, which would be formally opened in a dedication service the following month. The dedication, held on January 16, 1929, was both the fifth anniversary of the dedication of the Methodist Building itself and the ninth anniversary of Prohibition. The dual significance of the date was evident at the dedication service, when Bishop McDowell, who dedicated the chapel, said:

And as we now consecrate the Simpson Memorial Chapel as part of the building for its large uses in the nation and the world, let us now reconsecrate ourselves to the cause of temperance, prohibition and all public morals, to good citizenship in every part of our land, to every true form of civic welfare and sound government, ... to the safety of childhood and the integrity of the Christian home, to clean pleasures and wholesome social life, to right thinking and upright living...¹⁰³

McDowell's remarks connected the chapel to the Board's mission to defend the Christian home and to promote public Protestantism by influencing federal morality laws.

As with other parts of the Methodist Building, the funding for Simpson Memorial Chapel

¹⁰¹ Ballinger Company, "First Story Plan," blueprint, September 25, 1922, Methodist Building - Blueprints and Floorplans, undated, GBCS Administrative Records.

¹⁰² Wilson, "Fifth annual building report," December 4, 1928, page 5, Reports: General Secretary's annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson's annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection.

¹⁰³ Dedication of Chapel in "The Dedication of Simpson Memorial Chapel" (Washington, D.C., January 16, 1929), 21-22, Simpson Memorial Chapel Dedication, Wilson Collection.

offered insight into how Board leaders attributed religious significance to the space. However, rather than an extensive advertising campaign where the Board solicited pledges from MEC members, the roughly \$25,000 of chapel renovations had been funded entirely by an anonymous donor—someone Maude described to the Board as “a Philadelphia friend who, desirous of helping us and honoring the memory of the late Bishop Simpson.”¹⁰⁴ This sort of anonymous, restricted gift was relatively unusual in the Methodist Building’s history. The donation appeared in the financial reports for fiscal years 1928 and 1929 at almost \$14,000 each year, but the line item listed no donor name. Nor do the Board minutes from this period discuss a donor, or even a mention of chapel renovation project. Before Maude’s report no reference to a potential chapel exists; afterward, the Simpson Memorial Chapel appeared in the minutes as an occasional meeting location.¹⁰⁵ It also was the site of weddings, gatherings for MEC ministers and members as a place to meet, and where Boy Scout troops would meet.¹⁰⁶ Pieces of remaining evidence in the archive suggest it was highly likely that Bishop Matthew Simpson’s two adult daughters, Sarah and Ida Simpson were the anonymous donors behind the chapel. The two women lived in Philadelphia and both were familiar with Wilson personally and the Board’s work more generally. Several years later in their wills, both sisters bequeathed to the Board \$50,000 each “for the purposes of the organization.”¹⁰⁷ These two significant gifts, which the Board President

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, “Fifth annual building report,” December 4, 1928, page 5, Reports: General Secretary’s annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson’s annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection.

¹⁰⁵ Exhibit B, General Fund of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, June 30, 1929, General Fund, 1928-1929, GBCS Administrative Records.

¹⁰⁶ One wedding included the marriage of the granddaughter of William Jennings Bryan, who spoke at the Methodist Building’s dedication in 1924. She married Robert Lehman of the banking firm, Lehman brothers. Lehman’s cousin, at the time, was Governor of New York and later went on to become U.S. Senator from New York. *New York Herald Tribune*, June 26, 1934.

¹⁰⁷ Ida and Sarah Elizabeth Simpson, last wills and testament of Sarah Elizabeth and Ida Simpson, 1933, General Board of Church and Society legal documents, volume 2, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

later thanked Wilson for securing, evince a high degree of confidence in the Board and Methodist Building after the successful stewardship of a previous gift.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, while Wilson had long admired Bishop Simpson as a personal hero, he was chronically short on funds in his role as General Secretary. The Board, which still owed on the building mortgage in 1929, would have needed an external donor to finance this project. His two daughters, both unmarried and with considerable wealth from their family's estate, looking to honor their father's legacy were logical benefactors. The only credit the two women took was for donating portraits of their father and mother for the chapel.¹⁰⁹

That the two sisters remained anonymous while publicly honoring their father is significant indication of the gendered religious roles men and women played in making religious meaning in the Methodist Building. While the private contribution of the Simpson sisters reflected the role of women as caretakers of the Methodist Building as a Christian home, the public embrace of Simpson's mission was consistent with the Methodist Building's embodiment of public Protestantism. Just as Maude oversaw the decorating and maintenance of the interior of the building while public ceremonies featured the Board's male leaders like Wilson and McDowell celebrating how Protestants should influence American democratic institutions, the Simpson Memorial Chapel did the same. The chapel, in many ways, represented a microcosm of the various practices the Board adopted to attribute religious meaning to the Methodist Building. In contrast to the daughters, who attended the dedication service, but remained anonymous, their

¹⁰⁸ Edwin Holt Hughes to Clarence True Wilson, letter, October 18, 1937, Correspondence, 1935-1939, Wilson Collection.

¹⁰⁹ Prayer of Dedication in "The Dedication of Simpson Memorial Chapel," 24, Simpson Memorial Chapel Dedication, Wilson Collection; "Dedication of the New Chapel in the Methodist Building," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, February 1929.

deceased father played a very prominent role. In addition to the name of the space, Wilson provided a detailed, 16-page biographical address of Bishop Matthew Simpson at the chapel dedication. Wilson lionized Simpson for providing leadership after the MEC and MECS split in 1844 over theological differences on slavery, and for providing pastoral counsel to President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. Wilson portrayed Simpson as a close adviser to President Lincoln who frequently provided counsel to him at the White House. “At one of these visits, Bishop Simpson boldly told the President that he would have to get rid of slavery before God would let him win the war,” Wilson told the audience at the chapel dedication.¹¹⁰ This historical narrative is significant not only because it cast Simpson as a key adviser to Lincoln, but also because Wilson granted agency to the MEC Bishop over the President: he argued that Simpson *motivated* Lincoln to adopt the position that the Constitution outlawed slavery and he empowered Lincoln to believe that as a wartime President, Lincoln could emancipate American slaves.¹¹¹

Wilson’s biography of Bishop Simpson personified the public Protestantism that he hoped the Board would display through its Methodist Building. By privileging Bishop Simpson’s agency as a historical actor over President Lincoln’s agency, Wilson’s historical narrative also outlined the role that the General Secretary envisioned for the MEC and the Board to exert in

¹¹⁰ “Address: Bishop Simpson and His Wife; Their Life and Work,” in “The Dedication of Simpson Memorial Chapel,” 12-13, Simpson Memorial Chapel Dedication, Wilson Collection.

¹¹¹ David Donald’s authoritative biography of Abraham Lincoln does not mention Simpson when discussing the Emancipation Proclamation, or at any other time in the volume. He noted that Lincoln turned to Protestant religious leaders during the war effort, and that these churches offered strong support of him. In a May 1864 meeting with MEC leaders, Lincoln replied “God bless the Methodists” when the delegation noted their support for his administration. No mention of Simpson is recorded. Donald does note that Lincoln turned to Reverend Phineas D. Gurley of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington for counsel after his son, Willie Lincoln, passed away though the President never joined. David Donald, *Lincoln*, 337, 362-369, 542.

national politics. Like the Christian lobbyists who historian Gaines Foster argues exploited the antislavery precedent for Protestant Christian morality influencing federal law, Wilson did the same.¹¹² Wilson wanted the Methodist Building to be a site where the Board's advocacy for public morals would continue the legacy of Simpson, a fact he made evident during the dedication service:

We hope that the constant use of this room for religion, for reform, for charity and for patriotism may not only be a fitting memorial of Bishop Matthew Simpson and Ellen Verner Simpson, but that it may unite the work of both in such a way as to be a perpetual commemoration of the noblest type of family life we know in the annals of our Republic.¹¹³

Wilson, echoed by McDowell, envisioned the new chapel and the Methodist Building as whole as spaces that would enable the MEC to continue exercising influence as Protestants in government. By dedicating the chapel in his honor, Simpson both personified and provided a historical precedent for the public Protestantism that the Board sought to effect in American public life. In his biographical lecture at the chapel podium, Wilson described Simpson as the exemplary mid-nineteenth century American reformer, commenting that in addition to his antislavery politics, Simpson also displayed leadership on temperance, women's rights and suffrage, and the admission of lay people to General Conference. Simpson was an advocate for temperance and prohibition, and helped Frances Willard write a draft of the Women's Christian Temperance Union constitution, Wilson told the audience, analogizing nineteenth-century reforms to the Board's contemporary purview of "public morals."¹¹⁴

The dedication service, as hinted in Wilson's remarks above, also celebrated Simpson's

¹¹² Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2-4.

¹¹³ "Presentation of Chapel" in "The Dedication of Simpson Memorial Chapel," 12-13, Simpson Memorial Chapel Dedication, Wilson Collection.

¹¹⁴ "Dedication of Chapel" in *ibid.*

wife, marrying the public Protestantism in Bishop Simpson's biography with the Christian motherhood modeled in his wife's biography. Wilson portrayed Bishop Simpson as a man whose life work and public impact would not have been possible without his wife, Ellen Verner Simpson. He described her as his perfect companion, caring for his health and maintaining a good home. "She took care of their large family of seven children and freed her husband from anxiety, that he might uninterruptedly pursue his calling," said Wilson of Mrs. Simpson.¹¹⁵ Wilson also portrayed Mrs. Simpson as a model example of a nineteenth-century American female reformer, citing her involvement in foreign and home missions societies, homes for orphans and the elderly, and her role as vice president of the WCTU.¹¹⁶ By citing such activities, Wilson once again personified the "Christian citizenship" role he envisioned for a white Protestant Christian mother, a role that corresponded with Maude's own complimentary roles to Wilson. In dedicating the chapel *Simpson Memorial Chapel*, the Board lionized both of their legacies, and invoked narratives and symbolism of public Protestantism and the Christian home.

The décor of Simpson Memorial Chapel also reflected this same blending of domesticity and public Protestantism. Like other rooms in the Methodist Building, the chapel was furnished in a similar Victorian furniture style to the lobby, dining room, and apartments. The dark-paneled wood on the walls of the chapel was in the same style as the wood paneled conference room, and the drapes had the same shape and cut as those in the dining room. The dark wood chairs with upholstered seats were different from other pieces of furniture in the Building, but they complemented the chairs elsewhere. At the end of the chapel, where the chancel was located, were paintings of Bishop and Mrs. Simpson, donated by their daughters. An American flag stood

¹¹⁵ "Ellen Verner Simpson," in *ibid.*, 16-17.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

to the left. Except for the flag and the pulpit, the room bore much resemblance to a parlor room in a Victorian home.¹¹⁷ The material culture in the chapel, along with Wilson's biographies of the Simpsons, therefore blended the themes of public Protestantism and the Christian home to attribute religious meaning to the Methodist Building. The dedication of Simpson Memorial Chapel in 1929 represented at the Methodist Building's five-year anniversary was more than a mere renovation or an addition to the structure; the chapel represented the culmination of the Board's work in assigning a religious purpose to their building on Capitol Hill.



Figure 2.7 Photograph of Simpson Memorial Chapel, in Simpson Memorial Chapel Dedication, Clarence True Wilson Collection, Methodist Collection - Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

¹¹⁷ Photograph of chapel in *ibid.*, 1.

Conclusion

In less than a decade, the Board worked to transform its triangular lot from the banal-sounding square 726 to the “Methodist Building.” The Board altered the built environment of square 726, and through a series of public ceremonies, organizational practices, and material culture, invested the new structure with religious significance. That the Methodist Building was not originally intended as a space of worship, (even the addition of Simpson Memorial Chapel did not make worship the building’s primary purpose) meant that the Board leaders adopted deliberate practices and articulated particular narratives about the space in order to find religious meaning in it. When the meeting practices and public ceremonies of the Methodist Building are approached as religious practices, we can appreciate how the Board leaders invested the building with a religious significance. The two key themes the Board used to do so pivoted on the interior/exterior duality: to the surrounding world outside, the Methodist Building was an emblem of public Protestantism in Washington, promoting Protestant public morals on Capitol Hill. Inside, the Methodist Building mirrored previous Protestant architectural structures, including YMCAs, Institutional Churches, and the Victorian Christian home. By fusing these Protestant interior spaces, Board leaders portrayed the Methodist Building as a safe, interior space, removed from the dangers of urban life.

Furthermore, this process of religious meaning-making occurred in large part because of, not in spite of, commercial enterprise. The material culture from the Board’s series of fundraising solicitations indicates that the spiritual and the commercial were entwined. The media about the Methodist Building—postcards, newspaper features, photographic pamphlets, and advertisements—helped to introduce and promote the narrative of the Methodist Building as a sacred space to those in the MEC who could not be physically visit the space. Fundraising

solicitations invited MEC members to support the Board's mission of public Protestantism by donating money to construct the building. MEC members quite literally bought into the religious narratives and imagery the Board put forward about the Methodist Building when they donated funds.

Finally, the addition of the Simpson Memorial Chapel in January 1929 represented the culmination of the efforts to make the Methodist Building religiously significant. Through the memory of Bishop Simpson as a confidant and adviser to President Lincoln, Simpson Memorial Chapel represented the Board's aspirations of promoting public Protestantism on Capitol Hill and also embodied the domestic Victorian home of the Building's interior spaces. By the end of this construction period, the practices and artifacts of material culture enabled Board leaders to view the Methodist Building as a tangible symbol of their organization's public mission on Capitol Hill. And by almost personifying the Methodist Building as the emblem of their religious purpose and identity, the Board virtually ensured that the Methodist Building would become the subject of criticism when the Board's activity came under scrutiny.

Chapter Three: A Methodist Lobby on Capitol Hill: Politics, Protestantism, and the Apartment Annex, 1928-1933

Introduction

An illustrated postcard of the Methodist Building, produced a few years after it had opened, features an imposing white stone edifice with a large American flag waving atop its fifth story. Produced by the Chicago-based Curt Teich Company, the Methodist Building postcard was one of the many postcards the company printed featuring buildings in American cities.¹ Although collections online suggest that most Curt Teich postcards featured the Midwestern cities like Detroit and Chicago, the company also produced postcards of federal buildings and monuments in Washington, D.C., such as the White House, Capitol, Daughters of the American Revolution Building, and others.² The Methodist Building postcard mirrors the style of other Washington postcards, all featuring bright white buildings, blue skies, and green, manicured lawns. Like other Washington, postcards, the Methodist Building dominates the main frame. The building color is almost alabaster white, highlighting the contrast against the blue skies and green landscaping. At the top of the five-story building is an American flag.³ On the postcard, the flag is approximately the equivalent height of two building stories. It dominates the top third of the drawing, slicing the blue sky into two neat halves.⁴

¹ “Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals,” *Yearbook of the Methodist Episcopal Church* 85 (1918): 159–60.

² “Research Guide to the Curt Teich Postcard Archives Collection,” *Newberry Library, Chicago*, n.d., <https://www.newberry.org/curt-teich-postcard-archives-collection>.

³ Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press).

⁴ Curt Teich American Art, “Methodist Building at 100 Maryland Avenue NE” (Washington, D.C., 1925), Postcard Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C., PC AS .Meth01, <http://historydc.pastperfect-online.com/32595cgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=986AC058-E015-473F-BCDF-572534989347;type=102>.

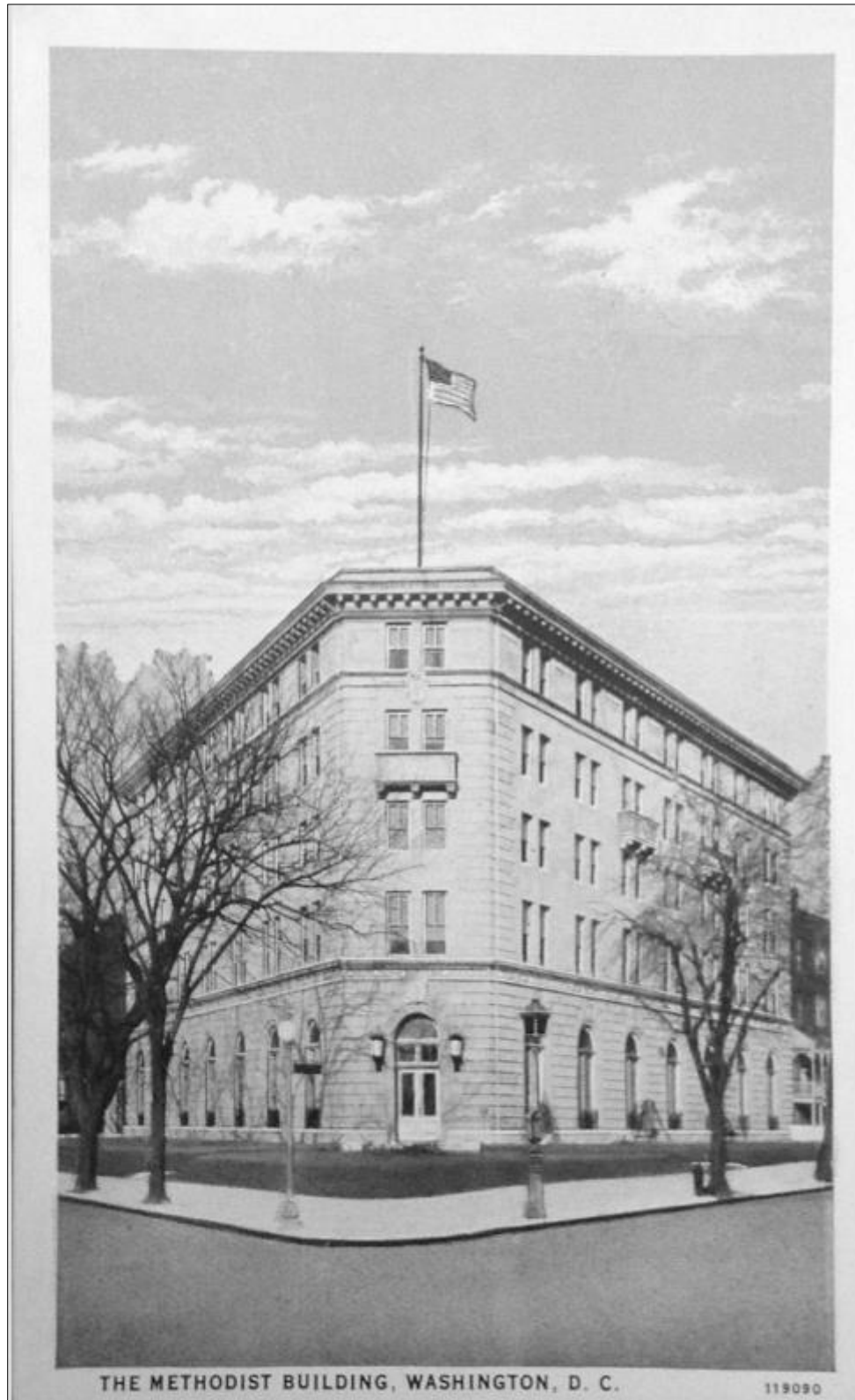


Figure 3.1 The Methodist Building at 100 Maryland Avenue NE, General Postcard Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

The size of the flag depicted on the postcard was likely fiction; photographs of the building rarely showed a flag, and when it appeared, it was much smaller.⁵ However, as a mass-produced piece of material culture, the postcard circulated the image of the Methodist Building as representing the Protestant establishment. Like the illustrated spreads printed in the *Christian Advocate* at the time of the cornerstone-laying ceremony, the postcard also situated the structure with federal buildings in Washington, D.C.⁶ The postcard reflected how the Methodist Building represented Wilson and the Board's understandings of public Protestantism, asserting their right as Protestants to participate in American democracy and shape federal morality laws. With an American flag on the top of a building identified as a Protestant religious building, the postcard announced the *publicity* of Protestantism in Washington, D.C. and American public life more generally.

Though the postcard itself was never the object of criticism, its visual representation of public Protestantism exemplified what made some elected officials, journalists, and other mainline Protestants uneasy about the Methodist Building and the Board's mission. Although the critics raised different objections, they expressed skepticism of a Protestant building on Capitol Hill, a sentiment which had been articulated since the Board first proposed constructing a building in 1916.⁷ During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Board faced a barrage of criticism from politicians, newspaper editorial boards, and mainline Protestants for its Capitol Hill

⁵ "U. S. May Buy Methodist Building," *Chicago Tribune*, December 28, 1930.

⁶ For example, two January 1923 issues of the *Christian Advocate* situated the Methodist Building within the built environment of Washington, D.C. federal government buildings and monuments. For a more thorough discussion, see chapter two. "What Men of Affairs Are Saying About It," *Christian Advocate*, January 25, 1923; "At the Nation's Capital: The Methodist Episcopal Church," *Christian Advocate*, January 4, 1923: 16–17.

⁷ Arthur Capper, "Letter to Clarence True Wilson," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, July 1, 1916.

building. Critics pointed to the Methodist Building as evidence that the Board was a lobby, flouting the separation of church and state, and therefore improperly involving itself in politics. Critics contended that a church should not own a building so physically close to Congress, or offer housing to elected officials. These critics also used the Methodist Building as a symbol to question if it was appropriate for the Board to promote Methodist values and lobby for the adoption of federal morality laws based upon Protestant Christianity. This chapter explores the criticisms of the Methodist Building—not to prescribe a normative relationship between religion and politics—but instead in order to understand the objections raised to the Board’s public Protestantism. When we examine the critics of the Methodist Building during the Prohibition era, we can appreciate how people challenged Protestant cultural centrality and privilege latent in assertions of public Protestantism.

Wilson, Pickett, and McDowell responded to these criticisms, defending the Board and the meaning of its Capitol Hill property in print and in testimony before Congressional committees. However, the most significant way the Board rebutted criticisms over the Methodist Building’s meaning was by expanding the structure. As in the past, the Board expressed its religious identity through the Methodist Building. The new extension, known as the apartment annex at 110 Maryland Avenue, had long been planned by the Board, but the four-story building of apartment units, which was completed in 1931, took on added significance when the Board and Prohibition faced attacks in the late 1920s and 1930s. When critics derisively called the Board a lobby, charging that the Board’s public Protestantism was inappropriate for Capitol Hill, the Board rejected calls to relocate, and instead chose to expand. To those who said a Protestant church should not have a building on Capitol Hill or that Prohibition needed to be repealed, the new apartment annex at 110 Maryland Avenue symbolized a commitment to the Board’s

location and to its mission of providing a Protestant presence and voice in Washington. Yet, as the apartments conveyed persistence and permanence, the presentation of the new building also demonstrated a shift in tone in the Board's understanding of public Protestantism. While the Board and the Methodist Building survived, Prohibition did not. The repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1933 represented a substantial blow to the Board's hopes of asserting Protestant Christian morality to shape American law, and the Board used its new apartment building to soften its identity. The Board retained its public role but began to downplay its assertive Protestant identity.

A "Church Lobby"?

In order to appreciate the significance that the apartment annex represented to the Board, it is first necessary to understand the criticisms the Board faced. Beginning in the mid-1920s, the Board and its Methodist Building came under scrutiny by journalists, elected officials, mainline Protestants, and Catholics for asserting public Protestantism. Critics focused on the Methodist Building on Capitol Hill as a symbol of the Board's violation of the separation of church and state. Journalist Hugh Fullerton portrayed the Methodist Building as the center of a small, watchful group of reformers who closely monitored the daily affairs of Congress. The article appeared in *Liberty*, a magazine dedicated to the topic of religious freedom and the separation of church and state in American politics.⁸ Fullerton compared the reformers to political bosses,

⁸ Published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the subject matter of *Liberty* reflected the Seventh-day Adventists' strong investment in the separation of church and state in American life. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is a Protestant denomination which concurs with the major theological beliefs of Protestant Christianity, including the authority of the Bible and the Trinitarian God, advocated for religious freedom so strongly in part because the tradition stands outside the Protestant mainstream in American culture. Seventh-day Adventism has historically endured lingering suspicion for its belief that the Sabbath is observed on Saturday, not Sunday, and for recommending dietary practices such as vegetarianism. The Seventh-day Adventist Church's residual stigma originates from the movement's the claim at its inception that the

explaining that when the reformers see a vote or a bill they do not like, they can “rally millions of people to back their demands and start a backwash of sentiment that will cause almost any Senator or Congressman to yield.” He characterized the Methodist Building as “the center and the rallying point of the majority of reform organizations of the United States,” explaining it was home to the MEC Board and the gathering point for other organizations. He dubbed the Methodist Building the “Capital of Reform” in his article, and noted that “irked, aggrieved, and irritated Senators and Congressmen refer to it as the ‘Little Capitol,’ the ‘Little House of Congress,’ and in private some of them attribute to its inmates dark designs upon the control of government.” This is a view Fullerton and *Liberty* shared about the Board and the reformers who worked in the Methodist Building, as the magazine’s visual illustration of the Methodist Building and the Capitol showed: the Methodist Building is in front of the Capitol, appearing as if the Capitol dome sat on top of the Methodist Building. Clarence True Wilson’s face appears in the space of the dome, almost as if he were a ghost watching over the space. The image echoes themes of surveillance and oversight displayed in the images in chapter two, but this image connotes more ominous or even malicious motives to the Board’s public Protestantism.⁹

Second Coming of Christ would occur in 1844. Anne Deveraux Jordan, *The Seventh-Day Adventists: A History* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988).

⁹ Hugh Fullerton, “Their Brothers’ Keepers: How the Organized Reformers at Washington Put Over Their Control on Public Morals,” *Liberty: A Magazine of Religious Freedom*, June 4, 1927.

Their Brothers' **K E E P E R S**

*How the Organized Reformers at Washington
Put Over Their Control on Public Morals*

An Article by

HUGH FULLERTON

ACROSS the park from the Capitol at Washington, almost midway between the Senate and the House office buildings, and near the Library of Congress, stands a handsome, rather severe building which is the Capitol of Reform. Irrked, aggrieved, and irritated Senators and Congressmen refer to it as the "Little Capitol," the "Little House of Congress," and in private some of them attribute to its inmates dark designs upon the control of the government.

In that building a small group of earnest reformers watch the wheels of government turning. When they see a need of reforming this or correcting that, they can rally millions of people to back their demands and start a backwash of sentiment that will cause almost any Senator or Congressman to hesitate or yield.

That building is titled the Methodist Building. It is the center and the rallying point of the majority of the reform organizations of the United States, and the home of the Methodist Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals. It is also the meeting place of the National Legislative Conference—which is interdenominational and which considers pending legislation; of the National Temperance Council; and of other reform bodies.

The Boards of Morals of nineteen other de-

nominations look toward that group for information and for leadership. It is closely allied to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, to the Anti-Saloon League, and to all the boards of the Protestant churches of America.

Two generals of the prohibition army—Wayne B. Wheeler (left) and F. Scott McBride of the Anti-Saloon League.

How many men and women that little group of reformers can reach quickly and influence, even they cannot tell. There are 8,920,000 Methodists, 8,397,000 Baptists, 2,546,000 Lutherans, 2,561,000 Presbyterians, 1,164,000 Episcopalians, and many others who can be reached quickly through the organization.

The reform leaders admit that, thus far, their organization is not so quickly mobilized in defense of the morals of the nation as they would like. But they are working toward closer co-operation and quicker results.

IT is not really one organization, but a community of interests, with the Methodist Board, in close touch with the national government, taking the leadership. They neither overestimate nor underestimate their power, nor apologize for it, since they believe they are using it unselfishly for the good of the country and not for advantage of any denomination. But it is hard to convince the august lawmakers across that beautiful park of this.

Abused, denounced on the floor of both Senate and House for alleged meddling in political

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

*I*N matters of morals, the Methodist Building in Washington, known as the Capitol of Reform, puts the National Capitol in the background. Here Dr. Clarence Tru Wilson holds sway.



© Henry Miller

Figure 3.3: "Their Brothers' Keepers," *Liberty*, June 4, 1927. From Gale, *Liberty* (database). © Gale, a part of Cengage, Inc. Reproduced by permission.

Criticism of the Board mixing religion and politics predated 1928, but the increased election-year publicity of Methodists in politics thrust the relatively unknown Board and its obscure Methodist Building into the public and political limelight. When the Democrats nominated Governor Al Smith of New York as the Party's candidate for president in July 1928, Methodists gained attention in papers such as the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Star*, the *New York Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Christian Science Monitor* opposing Smith for his stance on Prohibition as well as his Catholicism. The Board and the Anti-Saloon League both vehemently opposed Smith's nomination, stating that his lax enforcement of Prohibition as Governor of New York meant that Smith would repeal Prohibition if elected.¹⁰ For the rest of the campaign, Board leaders campaigned against Smith with vigor and alacrity. Newspapers across the nation reported on MEC members affiliated with the Board speaking against Smith's candidacy at events in Altoona, Pennsylvania, Washington state, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.¹¹ Though Smith pledged to defend the laws of the Constitution, those in favor of Prohibition fiercely rejected his candidacy. Research Secretary Deets Pickett opposed Smith's candidacy in a Virginia church, saying his election would lead to Prohibition's repeal. MECS Bishop James Cannon, who directed the MECS' Commission on Temperance and Social Service, encouraged his fellow Southern Democrats to defect from Smith and support

¹⁰ "Methodists Ask Democrats to Defeat Smith," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 9, 1928; "MINISTERS 'ASLEEP' ON PROHIBITION FOR TEN YEARS, CHARGE," *Washington Post*, October 1, 1928; "Methodists Score Smith: Wet Candidate for President Attacked as Churchmen Show How Dry Law Would Be Nullified," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1928; "CHARGES WETS AIM AT SUPREME BENCH: Methodist Board Says They Want a President to Name Anti-Dry Justices," *New York Times*, June 26, 1928; "Logic of the Wets," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, September 1928.

¹¹ "Methodists Urge Church to Work Against Smith: Ministers Defend Activity in Campaign to Defeat Governor as Wet," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 13, 1928; "Ministers Score Smith Candidacy," *Washington Post*, September 14, 1928.

Republican rival Herbert Hoover, who would uphold Prohibition.¹² And in early October, Methodist ministers gathered in the Methodist Building to state that they “will fight Smith on moral grounds.” The *Washington Post* headline added that “Ministers at Meeting Declare Religion has Nothing to do with Contest,” but referencing Smith’s religious affiliation drew attention to the veiled anti-Catholicism in the Methodist opposition to Smith’s candidacy.¹³

After Hoover trounced Smith in the election in November, popular press articles continued to scrutinize the Board’s influence in politics. Articles portrayed the coalition of Protestant reformers in Washington, D.C.—a group historian Gaines Foster refers to as the “Christian lobby”—who organized against Smith as ascendant and their brand of public Protestantism an especially influential force in national politics. A month after Hoover was inaugurated, journalist Arthur Sears Henning, the Washington bureau correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote that the 1928 election demonstrated this coalition’s “power to make and unmake presidents, governors, judges, and national and state legislatures.”¹⁴ Henning characterized this loose network of Protestant Prohibition reformers and their organizations as the “church lobby,” and wrote that the 1928 election emboldened the church lobby to exercise more political clout.¹⁵ Writing in *Liberty*, the magazine about religious freedom that had been

¹² David E. Kyvig, *Repealing National Prohibition* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000), 101–103; “The Significance of the Asheville Conference of Southern Dry Democrats,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, August 1928; “Methodists Here Will Fight Smith on Moral Grounds: Ministers At Meeting Declare Religion Has Nothing To Do With Contest,” *Washington Post*, October 2, 1928.

¹³ “Ministers ‘Asleep’ on Prohibition for Ten Years, Charge,” *Washington Post*, October 1, 1928; “Methodists Here Will Fight Smith on Moral Grounds: Ministers at Meeting Declare Religion Has Nothing To Do With Contest,” *Washington Post*, October 2, 1928.

¹⁴ Arthur Sears Henning, “The Lobby of The Churches: How Card-Indexed ‘Influence’ Is Giving Them Back Their Old Power Over Laws and Lives,” *Liberty: A Magazine of Religious Freedom*, April 6, 1929.

¹⁵ Arthur Sears Henning was the Washington correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* for decades. He became most famous for his biggest mistake: Henning wrote the erroneous headline, “Dewey

critical of the Board two years earlier, Henning characterized the church lobby as alarming because of the practices it employed. The church lobby, Henning wrote, is so adept at using the tools of democratic political organizing to influence elections and legislation that it holds the power to remake the United States into a theocracy, “clothed in the habiliments of democracy, but none the less a theocracy.” The church lobby employed the modern methods of machine politics and lobbying to attain an atavistic ambition of pre-Reformation dominance of the Church in all social and political matters. “The rule of the church by fiat is gone forever but through this proper organization of its influence the church can regain its temporal power,” Henning wrote.¹⁶ In effect, his analysis of the church lobby addressed the major tenets of public Protestantism—a prominent role for Protestant voices in public life, a claim that Protestant Christianity shaped the development of American democratic institutions, and an insistence on the right to govern based upon an explicitly Protestant identity—and characterized it as an alarming process that sowed the creation of an American theocracy.

Henning argued that the “church lobby” presented itself as an expansive network of Protestant churches organized in the interdenominational Federal Council of Churches and Prohibition reform agencies. Under closer examination, however, Henning contended that the Methodists, both from the majority-white Northern and Southern branches, constituted the leadership of and held much of the power behind the church lobby. The Federal Council of Churches was composed of 400 member churches, but Henning argued that such claims of interdenominational cooperation were vastly exaggerated; the MEC and MECS were the first- and second-largest churches by membership, according to Henning. “Less than a score of

Defeats Truman” for the 1948 presidential election. Henning, “Dewey Defeats Truman,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 3, 1948.

¹⁶ Henning, “The Lobby of the Churches,” 22.

clergymen, however, direct the operations of the church lobby,” he wrote. “In the inner circle of the groups the Methodist Church dominates.”¹⁷ Bishop Francis McConnell of the MEC served as president of the Federal Council of Churches, as well as president of the pacifist organization the Methodist Federation for Social Service. Bishops Cannon and McDowell, of the MECS and MEC respectively, each held positions on the Federal Council’s executive committee while also presiding over their respective denomination’s temperance and prohibition boards. Cannon also held leadership in the Anti-Saloon League. Bishop Thomas Nicholson and layman Ernest Cherrington, both members of the MEC, each held positions of leadership in both the Anti-Saloon League and sat on the Federal Council’s executive committee.¹⁸ Wilson, in addition to his role as General Secretary of the Board, served as vice-president of the National Dry Federation, a coalition of reform organizations supporting Prohibition.¹⁹

Historical scholarship shows that Henning overstated the role of Methodists in his so-called “church lobby,” but his characterization served to portray the leaders of the church lobby as akin to machine political bosses, or puppeteers pulling the strings behind the scenes. In practice, historical evidence of a “church lobby” is less Methodist-dominated and emerged chronologically earlier than Henning’s article implied. Foster argues the “Christian lobby” first developed during the Reconstruction era, when a loose alliance of Protestant reform organizations exploited the antebellum abolitionist precedent to persuade the federal government to enact moral legislation. Foster traced the origins of the Christian lobby in Washington, D.C. to the Anti-Saloon League, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the National Reform

¹⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁸ Cherrington would later succeed Wilson as General Secretary of the Board, upon Wilson’s retirement in 1936.

¹⁹ Henning, “The Lobby of The Churches,” 21–22.

Bureau, all organizations that claimed Methodist participants, but were not exclusively or predominately Methodist-led.²⁰ By neglecting this history, Henning was able to portray the “church lobby” as relatively new and lacking much of a history, as well as bolster his claims that this was primarily a Methodist enterprise.

Though he described the efforts of the Federal Council in influencing foreign policy, Henning considered the MEC Board of the Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals as “one of the most efficient of the church lobby.” The Board earned this status, in Henning’s opinion, because of the physical proximity of the Methodist Building to the Capitol. The location of the building indicated its ability to influence Congressmen and Senators. At the opening of the article, an image of the Methodist Building (with the large American flag flying atop) sits at the top left corner on a two-page spread. Reaching across the top of the left page to the illustration on the right page is a large hand. On the right-hand page, which depicts a scene of Members voting in the House of Representatives, the hand appears as if to move one Member. This image conveyed Henning’s understanding of the relationship the Board had with Congress, citing examples of Wilson coming over to the Capitol and sitting in the observer gallery of the Senate to watching a vote on Prohibition enforcement, or Senators who rented apartments in the Methodist Building also sponsoring legislation on Prohibition that the Board also supported. The implication, insinuated but never explicitly stated, was that the Board’s apartments bought the loyalty of Senators and Congressmen. In addition, Henning cited the inclusion of three Congressmen and three Senators among the Board’s advisory members as evidence of the close relationship the Board sought to cultivate with Congress.²¹

²⁰ Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

²¹ Henning, “The Lobby of the Churches,” 20-21, 24, 26.

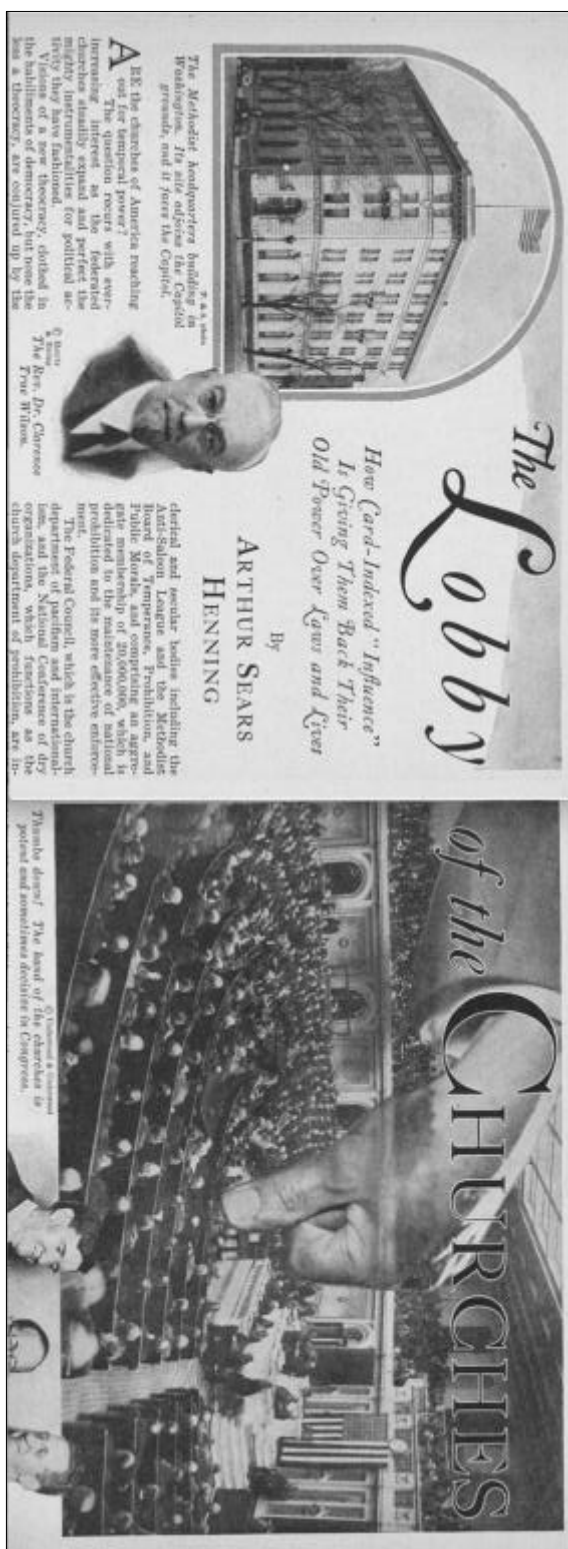


Figure 3.3 "The Lobby of the Churches," *Liberty*, April 6, 1929. From Gale, *Liberty (database)*. © Gale, a part of Cengage, Inc. Reproduced by permission.

Henning closed his article with an episode that he believed demonstrated how effective the Board could be in pressuring Congress. The example not only provided evidence of why he called the Board “one of the most efficient of the church lobby;” it also offered a narrative story that complemented the article’s opening image of the hand prodding a Member of Congress. Henning explained that the Board kept a card index of each Congressman and Senator, recording their religious affiliation as well as their votes on issues relevant to the Board. Based on a March 1927 *Voice* article, Henning described how the Board used this information when the Board wanted Senator Copeland to vote for cloture, a procedural motion in the Senate that ends debate on a bill, on a prohibition bill. The “Methodist lobbyist,” as Henning described the character, found Senator Royal S. Copeland’s name, and discovered he was Methodist. Though Copeland was a Democratic Senator from New York, which meant he allied with anti-Prohibition advocates, Henning reported that “the church lobbyist appealed to Copeland in the name of his church to give the vote necessary to victory.” Henning reported that with Copeland’s support, the cloture vote passed.²²

Henning’s 1929 “church lobby” essay sparked attention and controversy, especially because of the 1927 meeting between the Board and Copeland about the cloture vote. Henning reported for his paper, the *Chicago Tribune*, that Copeland reacted by accusing the Board of misrepresentation of the events. Reflecting on the meeting two years earlier, Copeland said that the 1927 *Voice* article, which Henning had written about, gave the reader the impression that the Board won Copeland’s vote through conventional lobbying, but he had planned vote in favor of cloture all along because he believed in enforcement, despite his misgivings about Prohibition.

²² Ibid., 27. “Washington This Month,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, March 1927.

Copeland said that he found the Board's appeal to him based on his church membership to be offensive and inappropriate. "I resented so strongly the imputation that I could be lobbied into support of legislation by invocation of my religious affiliation," he said. Henning added that Copeland found the Board and its Methodist Building a gross disservice to his church. "If I had my way," Copeland said, "The Methodist building adjoining capitol grounds from which Methodist activities influencing legislation are directed, would be razed stone by stone."²³

Copeland's remarks suggest that he saw the Methodist Building as the root of the problem: only razing the building "stone by stone" would ensure that the Board could not continue to lobby Members of Congress and Senators. He desired for the MEC to desist its involvement in politics, and believed that the best way to do so was to discontinue use of its Capitol Hill building. When newspapers covered the debate between Wilson and Copeland over the question of the Board as lobby, the Methodist Building figured prominently. The *Baltimore Sun*, a relatively local newspaper, had covered the Board and the Methodist Building since the organization moved to Washington in 1916 and began construction in 1922, but the *Sun* chose its article on the Copeland-Wilson lobby debate to describe the Methodist Building in detail. Marvin Murphy, the *Sun* reporter, explained that the Methodist Building was across the street from the U.S. Capitol, and the article featured a large photo of the exterior of the Methodist Building with an American flag flying atop it, representing the Building much like the mass-produced color postcard discussed in this chapter's opening. The article described the Methodist Building as the Board's headquarters, which the organization used to influence Congressional legislation on "prohibition and public morals." In addition to the watchdog role that the Board envisioned for

²³ Arthur Sears Henning, "Tear Methodist Lobby 'Capitol' Down: Copeland: Norris Quits Church Home," *Chicago Tribune*, April 24, 1929.

itself over Congress, Murphy also detailed the Board's policy of renting apartments in the building. The article presented the apartments as luxurious ones, designed to capture the Washington political elite. "With its marble floors and sound-deadening rugs, it is like the better class of apartment buildings in Washington," Murphy wrote. The article listed names of Methodist Building tenants, including Senators, Congressmen, and prominent church officials, like Cannon of the MECS. The *Sun* portrayed the apartments as providing close interaction between church leaders and public officials, insinuating that the apartments presented an unsavory mixing of religion and politics.²⁴

Both Murphy and Henning treated the recent news of Senator George Norris vacating his Methodist Building apartment as a parable presaging the building's impending demise. Murphy, writing for the *Sun*, explained that Norris, a Republican Senator from Nebraska, moved out because he had crossed parties to support Al Smith in the 1928 election, though the article also reported that he moved across town to be nearer to his daughter. Henning, writing for the *Tribune*, claimed that Norris's desire to move nearer to his daughter was merely an excuse. He contended that Norris moved out of the building out of embarrassment, as the Nebraskan Senator had earned a reputation as a vocal critic of lobbies in Washington. "When it was published last winter that Senator Norris was living in the headquarters of the Methodist lobby raucous chortles were emitted," Henning wrote, implying that Norris's credibility and ethics were in question as a result of residing in the building. Both Murphy and Henning used Norris's departure to illustrate that the Board's model of exchanging housing for political influence would no longer be viable

²⁴ Marvin Murphy, "Building Opposite Capitol Houses Methodist Forces," *Baltimore Sun*, April 26, 1929.

under increased scrutiny of the Methodist Building.²⁵

Methodist Theology, Reform, and the State

Wilson and Pickett responded to Henning's and Copeland's accusations of lobbying by more than merely challenging their critics' interpretations of the Copeland meeting and defending the Board's activities. Their explanation also provided insight into how Board leaders understood its public Protestantism. In their responses, Wilson and Pickett outlined what they interpreted as the appropriate relationship among Methodism, the state, and politics. Both acknowledged that the Board had reached out to Copeland for a meeting in 1927 about the cloture vote, but Pickett, who was the Board representative who met with Copeland, argued that he "never asked for him to support it, for the Senator had made up his mind and began telling Pickett the moment he entered what he was going to do." Pickett added that it was Copeland, not the Board, who had sought to exploit the meeting for political gain: according to Pickett and Wilson, Copeland wanted the Board to publicize the meeting in order to bolster his reputation as a Democrat who could work with Prohibition organizations. They speculated Copeland was jockeying to become the Democratic presidential nominee in 1928, and wanted to position himself as a less extreme alternative than Smith on the issue of Prohibition. "I wish you would," they recalled Copeland replying to Pickett's offer to publish news of their meeting. They implied that Copeland's original motives for the meeting were political and his recent denunciations of it were as well, first posturing for the Democratic nomination, and then placating the Catholic-dominated Tammany Hall political machine of New York.²⁶

²⁵ Murphy, "Building Opposite Capitol Houses Methodist Forces." Henning, "Tear Methodist Lobby 'Capitol' Down."

²⁶ Clarence True Wilson and Deets Pickett, "The Answers of Wilson and Pickett to Copeland," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, May 1929, 1, 4. News of the

Their portrayal of Copeland as beholden to political interests and pandering to different constituencies served as a foil to their depiction of the Board as displaying only honorable motives. Wilson and Pickett claimed that Pickett did not ask Copeland to “vote as a Methodist,” and would not do so, because the Board was not a lobby.²⁷ Whether Pickett’s retelling of the meeting was more accurate than Copeland’s account is impossible to determine, but what is clear is that amidst the heightened scrutiny that Henning’s coverage brought, Wilson and Pickett misrepresented the Board’s influence, network, and aspirations on Capitol Hill. As chapter one explained, the Board worked to cultivate relationships with sympathetic Congressmen and Senators by establishing a cohort of advisory members, who were invited to attend annual Board meetings and even gave presentations about pending legislation. Though advisory members had no formal role in overseeing governance of the Board, and no obligations to the Board, the existence of this role illustrates one way the Board sought to network with Congressmen supportive of Prohibition.²⁸ Of course, from its earliest inception, the Board intended the Methodist Building to be a center for Methodists and Protestants to influence federal morality laws, as indicated by Wilson’s first name for the building, “The Methodist PUBLIC SERVICE Station For LIGHT and POWER.” In that initial fundraising document Wilson explained that light meant, “Light for Congress on all important matters having to do with the Nation’s well being, [*sic*]” and power referred to the “Power of a great organized Methodist-Protestant religious body; intelligently and unbiasedly and unselfishly seeking to build up righteous in

original meeting between Copeland and Pickett appeared in Deets Pickett, “Washington This Month,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, March 1927, 1, 4.

²⁷ Wilson and Pickett, “The Answers of Wilson and Pickett to Copeland”, *The Voice*, 1, 4.

²⁸ Minutes of the annual meeting, December 4, 1917, page 1, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey; Methodist Episcopal Church et al., *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1920*. (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920), §490.3.

American life and to bring in the world-wide Kingdom of Christ.”²⁹ Wilson and Pickett intended the Board to influence the workings of Congress, and its Methodist Building to symbolize that mission. Their attempts to explain differently during the 1929 Copeland controversy were clear efforts at backpedaling.

That Wilson and Pickett elided parts of the Board’s history in order to downplay its pull in Congress is indisputable. However, their responses to the charge of the Board being a lobby illustrates how Wilson and Pickett understood public Protestantism differently than Henning and Copeland or did. Wilson and Pickett defined a lobby as an organization whose primary purpose was to promote and prevent the passage of specific legislation; it advanced its own self-interests; its motives and operations were furtive; and it was manipulative, maneuvering in backdoor manners or lacking transparency. Wilson wrote, “lobbying is not our line,” because the tasks of the Board included writing editorials, producing educational material, public speeches, and organizing Methodists. He added that the Board occasionally exercised the right of petition as provided by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but Wilson characterized petitioning Congress about Prohibition as in the public interest, or a matter of “public morals,” not a self-interest.³⁰ Based on their assumptions that Protestant Christianity shaped American democracy, Wilson and Pickett believed Protestants had a right to impact the political process. They

²⁹ Wilson, “Suggested Plan for Raising the \$250,000 Needed for Purchase of Property and Erection of New Building” 3-4, undated, Records of the General Welfare Division of the General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

³⁰ The immoral connotations Wilson and Pickett applied to their definition of a lobby was consistent with the period; when the Senate Lobby Committee formed later in 1929, a similar sense of social opprobrium applied to the committee’s understanding of a lobby. *Resolution to Investigate the Activities of Lobbying Associations and Lobbyists in and around Washington, District of Columbia*, Senate Resolution 20, 71st Cong., 1st sess., (October 1, 1929).

understood “*public* morals” to be shared and universally applicable, and not to mean advancing the narrow interests of the MEC denomination.

His belief in the right of Protestants to inform federal morality laws and participate in politics, his definition of public Protestantism, exempted Protestants from the malicious connotations of lobbying. “If to approach a member of the House of Representatives or the United States Senate for the purpose of petitioning that he vote for Prohibition legislation constitutes a lobby, then the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals is a lobby several times a year,” Wilson explained in a subsequent editorial, published in the *New York Post*. He quickly adding that by that definition, every other Protestant denomination would be considered a lobby, too. The exception Wilson outlined here was significant, because he suggested that when Protestant organizations lobbied for Prohibition, they neither acted in their own self-interest, nor were they secretive. Both the topic of legislation and the religious groups participating—Prohibition and Protestants, respectively—exempted the Board and its peers from being a lobby, as Wilson implied they were acting in the best interest of the entire American population.³¹

What Wilson presumed in this interpretation was that Methodist and Protestant values were universal *American* values, while lobbies were self-interested and not representative of the country. He contrasted the Board’s work with the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), a Catholic reform organization in Washington, D.C. that also endorsed Prohibition, as petitioning for “Catholic interests.” While Wilson stated Methodist and Protestant interests were American interests, Catholic interests were not universal, but instead un-American and

³¹ Clarence True Wilson, “Letters from *Post* Readers: From Dr. Clarence True Wilson,” *New York Post*, June 4, 1929, 12.

dangerous.³² The NCWC, which extensively covered the Copeland-Wilson lobby debate that spring, rejected Wilson's comparison. Patrick Ward, the Director of NCWC's Publicity Bureau, instead concurred with Copeland and Henning's characterizations of the Board as a lobby advancing specific Methodist interests. "It supports or opposes candidates for public office according to their acceptability or non-acceptability to the Methodist Church. Its purpose is political," Ward wrote.³³ Like Henning and Copeland, at the center of Ward's interpretation of the Board was the idea that Protestantism is not universal; he took umbrage at the assumption in public Protestantism that gave Protestants a uniquely prominent role in shaping American democracy and politics.

The contrast Wilson and Pickett drew between a lobby and the Board painted the Board in a favorable light, but it also illustrated the key assumptions they made about the relationship between Methodism and the state, and the history and theology of Methodist social reform. As Joseph Allen Land observed, Wilson was so convinced that alcohol was an unquestionable social evil that he devoted little effort or attention to articulating a theological rationale for temperance or Prohibition.³⁴ These newspaper essays ought not to be considered merely defensive arguments

³² Wilson and Pickett, "Clarence True Wilson and Deets Pickett, "The Answers of Wilson and Pickett to Copeland", *The Voice*, 1, 4. "What is a Lobby?" *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, May 1929, 3; "Methodists and Roman Catholics at Washington," May 1929, 2.

³³ NCWC News Service, "Methodist Board and N.C.W.C. Differ, Mr. Ward Explains," *N.C.W.C. News Sheet*, May 6, 1929. The NCWC followed the Wilson-Copeland debate quite closely in 1929 and 1930, as the following clips suggest: NCWC News Service, "Methodist Lobby Is Condemned by Senator Copeland," *N.C.W.C. News Sheet*, April 30, 1929; NCWC News Service, "Representative Tinkham Asks Dr. Wilson Series of Questions Relative to Latter's Denial That His Church Maintains Lobby at Capitol," *N.C.W.C. News Sheet*, June 10, 1929; NCWC News Service, "Church Dry Group Violated Corrupt Practices Act in Election, Letter to Attorney General Charges," *N.C.W.C. News Sheet*, July 1, 1929.

³⁴ Joseph Land Allen, "The Methodist Board of Temperance as an Instrument of Church Policy" (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1957), 64–65.

(which they were), but also evaluated for the theological and historical context they held. While Henning and Copeland perceived the Board as breaching the separation of church and state in an effort to create a theocracy, Wilson and Pickett articulated a robust history of Methodism in public life based upon their understanding of public Protestantism. The intellectual attitudes of the early twentieth century enshrined mainline Protestantism, of which the MEC was a part, as the establishment.

Twenty years prior, in 1908, the MEC wrote the Social Creed of the Churches which the Federal Council of Churches subsequently adopted. The Social Creed was unlike the Nicene Creed in that it did not address issues regarding the humanity or divinity of Jesus Christ, but rather consisted of a list of eleven statements about workers' rights, such as calling for the abolition of child labor, one day off each week, a living wage, the right to arbitration, and "the recognition of the Golden Rule and the mind of Christ as the supreme law of society and the sure remedy for all social ills."³⁵ By 1912, the Social Creed expanded from a statement on labor rights to also include statements on children's education, fair and equitable divorce laws, public health, and abolition of the liquor traffic. As Donald K. Gorrell explained, the Social Creed not only institutionalized social gospel values in mainline Protestant denominations; it also demonstrated how Methodist and other Protestant churches sought to use their platform as the establishment to speak from a position of moral authority in public life.³⁶

³⁵ Donald K. Gorrell, "The Social Creed and Methodism Through Eighty Years," *Methodist History* 26, no. 4 (July 1988): 213–28, quoted on page 215.

³⁶ Ibid. Donald K. Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility: The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1988), 191–192. Since the mid-twentieth century, historians treated Prohibition as anomaly or deviation from Social Gospel Protestant liberalism. More recently, scholars have made efforts to connect Prohibition with the Social Gospel movement. Paul A. Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel; Social and Political Liberalism in American Protestant Churches, 1920-1940* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1956); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform; from Bryan to F. D. R.*, 1st ed.

While the Social Creed illustrated how mainline Protestants and Methodists utilized their identity as the Protestant establishment to claim a mantle of moral authority in the early twentieth century, Methodist theology and the history of temperance informed the Board's understanding of the relationship between the church and the state. When the Board retold the history of Methodism, it emphasized founder John Wesley's support for temperance. As Russell Richey argued, Methodists often constructed their religious identities by retelling their history and situating it in a contemporary context.³⁷ This pattern is evident with the Board, as it cast Wesley as the leader of social reform. In the 1920 *Yearbook of the MEC*, Wilson or Pickett described Wesley as "A prohibitionist one hundred and fifty years ahead of his time," adding that Wesley encouraged abstinence from alcohol and at one point made it a condition for membership in the MEC. This retelling of history was anachronistic; reformers had not yet conceived of prohibition as a legal concept in the late eighteenth century. Yet such a narrative was useful to Wilson and Pickett because it allowed them to claim to be custodians of Wesley's legacy. As they put it, "In the creation of temperance sentiment, and in every movement for total abstinence or prohibition among the churches in this country, the impulse and leadership has come from our Church."³⁸ Wilson and Pickett retold history to position the MEC and their Board as the leaders of Prohibition and social reform, which included citing and overstating Methodist involvement the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League.

(New York: Knopf, 1955); Jason S. Lantzer, *"Prohibition Is Here to Stay": The Reverend Edward S. Shumaker and the Dry Crusade in America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

³⁷ Russell E. Richey, "History as a Bearer of Denominational Identity: Methodism as a Case Study," in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 480–97.

³⁸ "Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals," *Yearbook of the Methodist Episcopal Church* 87 (1920): 191.

This interpretation was a hubristic exaggeration, but Wilson and Pickett's understanding of Methodist leadership emerged out of Methodist theology. As explained in the introduction, Methodist studies scholar Richard Morgan Cameron argues that Methodist social reform theology emerged from Wesley's theological ideas about sanctification. Wesley argued that salvation was not a onetime event, but an ongoing process of moving toward perfection through grace, a process he called sanctification. Most importantly, Wesley envisioned sanctification as a social process, where perfection was only attained in relationship with others. Cameron explains that because of the concept of sanctification, Wesley's followers exhibited a perfectionist ethic. Methodists worked to reform problems in society in the same way that people moved toward perfection through God's grace. As Cameron explained, "One cannot help seeing how his [Wesley's] insistence on the doctrines of assurance and of Christian perfectionism would generate a pervasive sense of social responsibility."³⁹

Therefore, it is possible to understand how Methodist theology and public Protestantism informed the unique leadership role that Wilson and Pickett envisioned for the Board to play in American public life. According to Wilson's understanding of public Protestantism, most clearly outlined in his 1922 book *The Divine Right of Democracy*, he argued Protestants had the responsibility to assist the government in enacting moral laws because of the historical influence Protestant Christianity had upon American democracy. The relationship he envisioned between the church and the state was not a theocracy, but rather what he called a "Christian nation," in which Protestants worked to support and shape the government. "We will help to see that the church aids the state in maintaining good government, and thus to furnish a fulcrum of uplift for

³⁹ Richard Morgan Cameron, *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective* (New York: Abingdon, 1961), 34–35.

the moral betterment of mankind,” he wrote.⁴⁰ Wilson did not advocate for creating a Methodist state, or “Methodist interests” as Henning phrased it, but he did believe that Methodist values ought to inform the American republic.

Methodist readers supported Wilson’s defenses of the Board. They endorsed his public Protestantism, and his normative claim that Protestant values ought to be American ones, too. One reader echoed Wilson’s claims about Methodist versus American interests. “The Methodist Church seeks nothing for itself and Dr. C[opeland] ought to know that,” wrote G. Morrison a member of Calvary MEC in East Orange, New Jersey. Morrison also wrote that Copeland would not have said these things about a Roman Catholic organization, implying that Copeland relied on Catholics for political support. Lillian J. Wendstrand of Brooklyn espoused a similar theory, suggesting that Copeland was “under political pressure, can be compelled to make such utterly ridiculous and positively false statements.” The writers, both Methodists, also championed the role of the MEC in Washington, reflecting some of the same theological and historical assumptions Wilson and Pickett made. “The M. E. Church has always lead [*sic*] in social or moral reform,” wrote Morrison, while Wendstrand “applaud[ed] the splendid service that the Methodist Episcopal Church is rendering to our beloved nation and its people through the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals.”⁴¹

The Senate Lobby Investigation and Public Protestantism

The exchange in the spring of 1929 about whether the Board was a lobby launched a very public debate about the relationship among Protestantism, reform, and politics. The Methodist

⁴⁰ Clarence True Wilson, *The Divine Right of Democracy; Or, The People’s Right to Rule: A Study in Citizenship*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1922), 98.

⁴¹ G. Morrison to Wilson, letter, June 5, 1929; Lillian J. Wendstrand to Wilson, letter, June 6, 1929, Correspondence, 1929-1932, Wilson Collection, Methodist Collection - Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

Building figured prominently in that debate because the structure served as a symbol of the Board's public Protestantism. Both the Board's defenders and its critics used the Methodist Building as a contested space to evaluate the proper relationship among Protestantism and Catholicism in American public life. Congressman George Tinkham, a Republican of Massachusetts, used the lobby debate to launch a Congressional investigation into whether the Board was improperly using its funds to lobby. Like Copeland and the press, Tinkham connected his allegations to the Methodist Building itself. Tinkham asked Wilson in a letter, "Did not your board, in publications issued in 1922 and 1923 in connection with the raising of funds for your present building, speak of its location as 'strategic' because 'we have the location of all locations just opposite the senate wing of the capitol'?" Though Wilson and Pickett sought to downplay the Board's influence by misrepresenting the building's history, Tinkham pressed them on it, using old articles from the Board's own *Voice*.⁴²

By quoting documents from the Board's fundraising campaigns for the Methodist Building, Tinkham tried to force Wilson to admit that the Board was indeed a lobby. Like Henning, Tinkham frequently cited the location of the Methodist Building as evidence of the Board's practices of soliciting Congressmen and Senators. "He could not deny that the board had selected the location of its present headquarters abutting upon the capitol with a view to establish a permanent ecclesiastical political lobby," Tinkham said.⁴³ Board replies to Tinkham's criticisms focused less on the Building location, and instead asked why the Board should be singled out for criticism and not the Catholics. Pickett contended Tinkham displayed religious

⁴² "Tinkham Puts a Few Questions to Methodists: Challenges Dr. Wilson To Deny Lobby Charge," *Chicago Tribune*, June 10, 1929.

⁴³ "Methodist Lips Sealed By Guilt, Tinkham Cries: Lobby Accused of Ignoring Corruption Act," *Chicago Tribune*, June 17, 1929.

discrimination toward the Board, while Tinkham stated he wanted to ensure the separation of church and state. Pickett also attempted to make a tenuous connection between Tinkham's inquiry about the Board and the Congressman's perennial attempts to reduce the Southern states' Congressional representation because of the region's disenfranchisement of African Americans. A liberal Republican from Massachusetts, Tinkham had earned a reputation in the House for his support of black civil rights.⁴⁴ "The two most contemptible motives which enter the human breast are sectional prejudice and religious bigotry," wrote Pickett. "Mr. Tinkham does not hesitate to appeal subtly or blatantly to both of these unworthy subjects." Pickett, a Southerner by birth, accused of Tinkham being divisive, picking unnecessary fights between the North and the South in addition to now criticizing Protestants while exempting Catholics. By siding with white Southerners and Protestants, Pickett's statement once again centered the Board's white Protestant values as national and universal, while Tinkham's concerns were provincial, regional, and limited to religious and racial others.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ "G. H. TINKHAM IS DEAD AT 86: Veteran Ex-Legislator Was Called 'Most Picturesque,'" *Baltimore Sun*, August 29, 1956; "TINKHAM, George Holden, (1870-1956)," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=T000283>; History on March 24 and 2014, "George H. Tinkham—The Subtitles Write Themselves | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives," accessed April 15, 2017, <http://history.house.gov/Blog/2014/March/3-24-tinkham/>.

⁴⁵ Pickett was born in Texas. "Methodist Drys Reply to Tinkham: Statement Evades Six Specific Questions Asked By Congressman," *Baltimore Sun*, June 14, 1929; "Dry Lobbying Charge Denied By Dr. Wilson: Secretary of Methodist Temperance Board Expresses Contempt for Tinkham," *New York Herald Tribune*, June 20, 1929; "Official Defends M.E. Board; Denies Tinkham Charge," *Chicago Tribune*, July 2, 1929; "Methodists Deny Board Violated Campaign Act: Expenditures Declared Outside of U.S. Jurisdiction," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 2, 1929; "M.E. Board Again Answers Tinkham: Asks Why It Should Be Singled Out for Attack with Catholics More Active," *Baltimore Sun*, July 15, 1929. Carl F. Price, ed., "Pickett, Rev. Elbert Deets," *Who's Who in American Methodism* (New York: E. B. Treat & Co.), 171.

Tinkham continued to criticize the Board throughout the summer of 1929, contending that it had violated the Federal Corrupt Practices Act of 1925 by not reporting its political expenditures in the 1928 election. By the end of the year, Tinkham called for the newly authorized Senate Lobby Committee to launch an investigation into the Board's activity.⁴⁶ First enacted in October 1929, the Senate Lobby Committee was a subcommittee under the Judiciary Committee charged to investigate the practices of lobbyists attempting to influence legislation in Congress. The authorizing Senate Resolution described lobbyists as manipulative, dishonest, and greedy, lacking transparency in how they acquired and spent funds. The committee first subpoenaed individuals who lobbied for tariff policies in American trade, and soon expanded to the regulation of utilities. The committee did not begin an investigation into pro- and anti-Prohibition organizations until April 1930, almost six months into its work.⁴⁷

In the committee hearing, the chair, Senator Thaddeus Caraway of Arkansas, reminded Tinkham he was to testify about how the Board influenced Prohibition legislation, but Tinkham attempted to broaden the scope of his testimony, charging that the Board violated the separation of church and state by attempting to lobby Congress.⁴⁸ Tinkham cited the Methodist Building as

⁴⁶ "Tinkham Urges Lobby Inquiry into M.E. Board: Legislator Also Charges Federal Council of Churches 'Interferes' in Politics," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 2, 1929.

⁴⁷ Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, *Hearings on S. Res. 20*, 71st Cong., 1st sess., 1930, 3533-3675.

⁴⁸ Caraway was a Democratic Senator from Arkansas from 1921 until his death in 1931. Prior to his election, he served as a Member of the House, where he voted for Progressive amendments, including the Eighteenth (Prohibition), and Nineteenth (women's suffrage), as well as sponsoring legislation to segregate the District of Columbia. Upon his death, his wife Hattie Wyatt Caraway was appointed to succeed him in his Senate seat. When she won election to that seat in 1932, she became the first woman ever elected to the Senate. "CARAWAY, Thaddeus Horatius, (1871-1931)," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, accessed July 17, 2017, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000139>; "CARAWAY, Hattie Wyatt, (1871-1931)," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, accessed July 17, 2017, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000138>.

evidence of this breach, arguing that the building allowed the Board to lobby by soliciting Members of Congress and exerting pressure on how they might vote on legislation. “The location of these headquarters—I am referring to the Methodist Board—directly opposite the Capitol is neither fortunate nor strategic except for the purpose of maintaining close surveillance upon Congress and intimate contacts with Members of Congress,” said Tinkham.⁴⁹ As he had before, Tinkham cited the January 1923 issue of the *Voice*, which reported on the cornerstone-laying ceremony. In that issue, Wilson described the construction site as “strategically located,” though he did not elaborate on that phrase.⁵⁰ When Tinkham brought up the building, the Senators on the committee at first confused the site with the Driscoll Hotel, which was the location of the Anti-Saloon League. Tinkham, perplexed, reiterated that the Methodist Building was the headquarters of the Board, and the organization described their location as “strategic.” Senator Robinson of Indiana replied, “Some Members of the Senate live in that building. It is an apartment house,” Robinson said, dismissing Tinkham’s concern over the Methodist Building. Tinkham insisted that the location of the property on Capitol Hill provided evidence that Board intended to use the space “for surveillance and contact with Members of Congress.” While Tinkham insisted on the location of the building, Robinson emphasized its use as an apartment house, attempting to undermine Tinkham’s case by claiming that irrespective of its location, the Methodist Building had an innocuous purpose.⁵¹

While Tinkham described the Board’s public Protestantism as an alarming trend that would establish a theocracy, committee members found Tinkham’s concern to be overblown.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3745.

⁵⁰ Clarence True Wilson, “The General Secretary Appeals to You: January 28th Is the Day,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, January 1923.

⁵¹ Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, *Hearings on S. Res. 20*, 71st Cong., 1st sess., 1930, 3744-3747.

Tinkham argued that the Board's efforts to assert Protestant morality in the shaping of federal legislation was equivalent with establishing a state church, therefore violating the establishment clause of the First Amendment. He said:

The board of temperance, prohibition, and public morals of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America have set aside entirely this principle. They have asserted their right to interest themselves as ecclesiastical organizations politically in all moral questions. There is hardly a question or an issue which can not arbitrarily be held to be a moral question or a moral issue, and if through coercion, open or implied, and political action, direct or indirect, on the part of a nationally organized church, or nationally organized churches, and fear on the part of the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives of political reprisals, the Congress of the United States is subject to this dictation and this influence, no longer do we have in the United States except in form a representative democracy; we have in fact a theocracy, a government by the church.⁵²

Tinkham's statement reflects what David Sehat has called the "moral establishment," which referred to how moral legislation enacted by the state reflected Protestant Christian values. The term moral establishment reflects Sehat's contention that by lending state sanction to Protestantism, the separation of church and state was a "myth," and not a historical reality.⁵³ The Senate Lobby Committee was not persuaded by Tinkham's efforts to describe the Board as the moral establishment, nor did the committee share his alarm over the privileged role that Protestantism enjoyed. Senator Caraway challenged Tinkham's interpretation of the First Amendment, saying, "What the Constitution was inhibiting was legal representation or establishment of a church and the lending of the State aid to it, or the controlling form of its worship." Caraway drew a distinction between an established church and a church's attempt to influence legislation. He found no harm with public Protestantism's aspiration to inform American law and politics. Tinkham was ultimately forced to acknowledge that the Board may

⁵² Ibid., 3779.

⁵³ David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5–8.

not be “violating the words of the Constitution, but in my opinion, violating most violently the spirit of that Constitution.”⁵⁴

When Pickett testified before the Senate Lobby Committee a month later, his prepared remarks once again misrepresented the history of the Methodist Building in order to retroactively downplay the Board’s influence. He argued that the language of “strategic location” referred to the Library of Congress, not the Capitol Building or Senate Offices, but this is a clear misrepresentation. In the January 1923 edition of the *Voice*, when Wilson used the phrase, it described how the Board’s building would be “this headquarters for the Protestant and Methodist interests and their program of moral welfare for the world.”⁵⁵ The Methodist Building was to symbolize the Board’s mission of public Protestantism and its location on Capitol Hill was intended to assist the Board in shaping federal morality legislation. Throughout Pickett’s two-day testimony before the Committee, he emphasized the Board’s purpose as a religious educational organization, whose mission was to disseminate information about Prohibition to young people, members of the MEC, and when necessary, Congress. He framed the Board’s interest in Prohibition as a *moral and educational* concern, not a political issue. As a church organization designated to promote temperance and prohibition education, Pickett rationalized that it was acceptable for the Board to educate and present information to Members of Congress when moral issues, such as Prohibition, came before the body. When pressed by Senator Blaine to explain why the location was called “strategic,” Pickett cited the Methodist Building’s proximity to other Washington landmarks. He said that the location provided for access to do research at the Library of Congress, and for access Union Station, which helped the Methodist

⁵⁴ Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, *Hearings on S. Res. 20*, 71st Cong., 1st sess., 1930, 3779-3780.

⁵⁵ Wilson, “The General Secretary Appeals to You,” *The Voice*, January 1923.

Building be “a perfect crossroads where we meet Methodists from all parts of the world.”⁵⁶ More than just a misrepresentation of the historical record, Pickett’s remarks about the Methodist Building suggest that the Board recognized that its public Protestantism had subjected it to heightened scrutiny. Pickett’s response is some of the first evidence of the Board beginning to downplay its Protestant identity in American public life. While the Board defended its right to have the Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, it also used the moment to demonstrate Protestant leadership outside of influencing Congressional legislation.

Apartment Annex Planning, 1930

Though the Senate Lobby Committee ultimately found that the Board did not violate the Federal Corrupt Practices Act, the debate over whether the Methodist Building was a lobby continued into 1930 and 1931. The planned expansion of the Methodist Building served as a proxy for each side’s arguments. The new building would be a defiant statement to the its critics, announcing that the Board belonged in Washington. The construction of an apartment annex became a contested event in which the Board and its critics each made their case for or against the Board’s public Protestantism. In the winter of 1929, during the middle of the debate about whether it was a lobby, the Board spent its annual meeting planning to address the committee the following year. At that meeting, the Board interpreted the Senate Lobby Committee investigation as an attack on Prohibition, and an effort “to preach the doctrine that no wet is under an obligation to obey a law which doesn’t meet his own approval.”⁵⁷ In addition to preparing its testimony before Congress, the Board hoped to respond in a more symbolic manner. The Board stated that it was imperative that the Methodist Building be secure for the future in order to

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4720-4721.

⁵⁷ Clarence True Wilson, “Let’s Fight,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, May 1930.

affirm its symbol of the Board's beliefs about the active role Protestants ought to play in public life. At that annual meeting, the Board's leadership decided to construct a building adjacent to the current structure, on the Maryland Avenue, or eastern side, of its property. The Board proposed to answer to claims that the Methodist Building did not belong on Capitol Hill by constructing an addition.⁵⁸

Plans to construct an apartment annex adjacent to the original Methodist Building dated at least as early as 1927, when Maude Aiken Wilson first proposed the idea in her annual building report.⁵⁹ As chapter two demonstrated, early twentieth-century Methodists embraced the concept of church-owned apartment buildings as a way to generate revenue for their urban churches. This also added height to their buildings, further demonstrating their prominence on the urban landscape. According to architectural historian James Goode, construction of new apartment buildings surged in Washington during this period, after World War I and before the Great Depression, as a growing population in the city increased demand for housing.⁶⁰ At the same time, plans for the MEC's Broadway Temple in Upper Manhattan included two twelve-story apartment houses on each side of the proposed church's central tower.⁶¹ However, in the midst of the Congressional investigation about the Board's political involvement, the idea for the apartment annex gained added significance and greater urgency. At the 1929 annual meeting, Wilson concluded her building report with plans for the new apartment building. "The Board is

⁵⁸ Executive committee meeting minutes, January 17, 1930, page 2, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁵⁹ Maude Aiken Wilson, "Fourth annual building report," November 29, 1927, page 7-8, Reports: General Secretary's annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson's annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection.

⁶⁰ James M. Goode, *Best Addresses: A Century of Washington's Distinguished Apartment Houses* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 173-174.

⁶¹ "Broadway Temple Dedication Today," *New York Times*, June 29, 1930.

planning expansion,” she said, a defiant statement in light of the criticisms Tinkham and Copeland leveled. She told the managers of the plan for constructing a five-story apartment building with unflagging certainty, using verbs like “will” to emphasize its inevitability. She told the board that the addition of an apartment building would work to ensure the longevity and financial stability of the existing Methodist Building, for which the Board still owed on the mortgage. Wilson assumed that a new apartment building would quickly pay off the remaining building mortgage and provide a source of continual revenue for the Board, implying that any indebtedness on the Methodist Building could imperil the Board’s future to practice public Protestantism on Capitol Hill. She proposed that the apartment extension would make the Methodist Building self-supporting, providing the Board with the financial resources to remain on Capitol Hill, and by offering housing, the Board would offer a valuable resource to the community.⁶²

The urgency with which the Board moved on the new apartment building in early 1930 is suggestive that Board leaders believed the new building would be a response to their critics, both politicians and journalists. By January 1930, the executive committee of the Board agreed to authorize plans for a new building.⁶³ Robert Ballinger, son of the late Walter Ballinger, the architect who had designed the original Methodist Building, drew up preliminary plans by February for the proposed building. The new building would be a physical continuation of the extant building, at the same height of 72 feet and five stories. The *Washington Evening Star* emphasized the enormity of this expansion, explaining that the addition of another five-story

⁶² Wilson, “Sixth Annual Building Report,” December 4, 1929, pages 7-8, Reports: General Secretary’s annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson’s annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection.

⁶³ Executive committee meeting minutes, January 17, 1930, page 2, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

building “would more than double the floor space of the headquarters.”⁶⁴ In addition to the practicality of providing fifty-five new apartment buildings to rent, the consistent structure of the proposed building visually demonstrated the Board’s arguments of continuity that leaders like Pickett and the Wilsons suggested in their rhetoric. Ballinger’s floor plans also suggested continuity of mission: with the majority of apartments featuring one-bedroom or studio units with small kitchenettes, Ballinger’s apartment plan reiterated the Board’s original intention for offering room and board to residents who might be Congressmen and Senators. Despite Copeland and Tinkham’s skepticism, the Board suggested no plan to retreat from its original housing mission.⁶⁵

The Board’s plans for acquiring the funds for the apartment building extension were also indicative of the urgency with which its leaders desired the new building. Unlike the construction of the original Methodist Building, which involved a multiyear fundraising effort enlisting the entire MEC, the Board decided instead to immediately borrow the funds needed for construction. At a special meeting of the managers in May 1930, the Board authorized the Building Committee to take out a loan for \$600,000 from the Washington Loan and Trust Company to cover the costs of construction.⁶⁶ Though no reason was stated in the minutes for why the Board chose to immediately procure a loan, a 1944 *Voice* article written when the Board finally paid off the mortgage on the Methodist Building suggests this decision was motivated by the Great

⁶⁴ “Methodist Building Addition Studied,” *Washington Evening Star*, April 3, 1930.

⁶⁵ R.I. Ballinger to Board managers, letter, February 4, 1930, Board of Temperance - Building Specifications and Furnishings, 1922-1923, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁶⁶ Special meeting minutes, March 11, 1930; special meeting minutes, May 23, 1930, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

Depression.⁶⁷ Like many other institutions during the Depression, the MEC also experienced a decline in giving and therefore funding for its Boards, so a bank loan was the quickest way to have access to the needed capital to fund its construction. And given that the primary goal of the annex was primarily to put the Board on firm financial footing, the Board likely did not want to spend time on a lengthy, multiyear fundraising campaign as it had with the original Methodist Building.

Despite the Board's desire to begin construction on the new apartment annex as quickly as possible, it faced several bureaucratic obstacles from the federal government in the spring of 1930. These events coincided with the Congressional investigation, and though unrelated, the Board soon interpreted the events in the spring of 1930 as two deliberate attempts to stymie the building project. In reality, zoning battles over apartment buildings were quite common in Washington, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, Goode has noted. Citizens opposed construction of large apartment buildings in prominent neighborhoods, while developers petitioned for exemptions from zoning restrictions.⁶⁸ On the heels of Pickett's testimony to Congress, the Board submitted its building plan to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia in order to request permission to construct the apartment annex at the same height of the existing Methodist Building, 72 feet, instead of the regulation 60 feet. Residents in the neighborhood fiercely opposed the plan, petitioning the Zoning Board to reject the height exemption on the grounds that it would raise the heights of other residential buildings in the Capitol Hill neighborhood.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ "Mortgage on Methodist Building Cancelled: The Mortgage Principal and Interest Paid in Full, Methodist Board of Temperance Now Debt-Free," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, February 1944.

⁶⁸ Goode, *Best Addresses*, 185–188.

⁶⁹ "Architects Urge Increased Height for Apartments," *Washington Evening Star*, June 4, 1930; "Apartments Hit by Home Owners: Zoning Commission Hears Encroachment Charges by Residents," *Washington Evening Star*, June 5, 1930.

However, under the newly enacted Shipstead-Luce Act, the Zoning Commission was required to defer to the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), which had authority to regulate the appearance, size, material, and color of any buildings abutting or adjacent to any federal government buildings. Because the Methodist Building faced both the Capitol Building and the site of the future Supreme Court Building, the CFA held jurisdiction over the Board's constructions plans.⁷⁰

Upon reviewing the proposal at its September 1930 meeting, the CFA allowed the 72-foot height exemption, but not before expressing distaste for the Methodist Building and openly fueling speculation that the federal government might acquire the property in the near future. In the Commission's decision on the Methodist Building extension, the CFA included a letter from Cass Gilbert, architect of the new Supreme Court Building, stating, "I believe that if the addition is made at the same height of the existing building it would present a better architectural appearance than though the addition were lowered to comply with the 60' limitation."⁷¹

However, Gilbert found the 72-foot height exemption as less than optimal. He preferred if the federal would acquire the entire site of the Board's property, giving the government unfettered access between the Supreme Court, Senate Office, and Capitol Buildings. "But if it is to remain a site for buildings," Gilbert conceded about the site of the Methodist Building, "I see no objection to the addition of the existing building having the same height as the existing structure."⁷²

⁷⁰ Frederick Albert Gutheim et al., *Worthy of the Nation: Washington, DC, from L'Enfant to the National Capital Planning Commission* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 193–208; "Zoning Changes Refused Owners of 19 Properties: Proposals of M.E. Temperance Board and David A. Baer Are Defeated," *Washington Evening Star*, June 8, 1930.

⁷¹ Cass Gilbert to David Lynn, letter, September 8 1930, in "Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts," Records of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as CFA Records).

⁷² *Ibid.*, 2.

Following Gilbert's recommendation, the CFA chair, Charles Moore, reluctantly agreed to allow the Board to construct a 72-foot building extension. In his letter to the Commissioners of the District authorizing the construction plan, Moore reminded them that the 1901 McMillan Commission's Plan for Washington stipulated that all land surrounding the Capitol become federal government property. Moore continued to note that two city squares impeded the realization of this plan, including the square where the Methodist Building was located. "In all probability these two remaining squares will eventually be taken over by the Government, as should happen," wrote Moore, encouraging Congress to take action. He continued to describe the architectural aesthetic of the Methodist Building as an eyesore, describing its style as not only outdated, but "disappeared beyond revival." The Methodist Building "presents an awkward and undignified appearance entirely out of keeping with its neighbors, the Supreme Court Building now under construction and the Senate Office Building," wrote Moore, all but pleading for Congress to acquire the property even as the CFA endorsed the construction project.⁷³

Because of the Pyrrhic victory the CFA awarded the Board, a cloud of uncertainty hung over the Board's annual meeting in December 1930. After spending the previous eighteen months defending itself, the organization's building, and the cause of Prohibition in both Congress and in print, the Board's entire future on Capitol Hill was in doubt. Not only had no progress been made on the new building, but the *Washington Star* reported rumors that the existing building and property would soon face demise.⁷⁴ The Board entered its annual meeting on December 9, 1930 with much uncertainty about both the proposed addition and the current structure. The minutes do not recount the discussion, but it is evident that the Board was aware

⁷³ Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, September 8, 1930, pages 20-21; Gilbert to Lynn, September 8, 1930, CFA Records.

⁷⁴ "Methodists Meet Dec. 9 on Addition," *Washington Evening Star*, December 2, 1930.

of the ambiguous future of the entire property: the minutes included a copy of Gilbert's September 1930 letter permitting the height exemption under the condition the government did not acquire the property.⁷⁵ Yet, at least publicly, Wilson projected optimism. Her assertion to the managers, "We still hope before another Annual Meeting comes, we will be able to overcome the opposition which we have had to meet at every move in this city, and have our new building completed and occupied by people who eagerly desire to live on Capitol Hill," implied that proposals to acquire the property would only hinder, not help, the efforts of Congress. Once again, Wilson described the Methodist Building apartments as providing a valuable service to Members of Congress. "It would surprise the Board to know the real regret expressed by many members of both Houses of Congress that the delays in our building enterprise [*sic*] compel them to seek homes elsewhere," she said.⁷⁶

By arguing that the delay and uncertainty hurt Congress, Wilson highlighted the support the apartment building plan had from members of the government. This challenged arguments that called for the acquisition of the Methodist Building, which were articulated by some government officials, such as the Architect of the Capitol at the time, David Lynn, who was responsible for overseeing the buildings and grounds on the Capitol Hill campus. As Gilbert's letter and the CFA had hinted, federal acquisition of the Board's property had become a growing possibility in 1930. Lynn, as the Architect of the Capitol, had expressed his desire to the House Appropriations Committee in March that the federal government should acquire the Methodist

⁷⁵ Annual meeting minutes, December 9, 1930, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁷⁶ Wilson, "Seventh Annual Building Report," December 9 1930, General Secretary's annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson's annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection.

Building property.⁷⁷ A few months later, in June, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission released a new plan for East Capitol Street corridor, calling for the construction of a parallel mall east of the Capitol Building stretching to the Anacostia River. The East Capitol Plan also called for the demolition of the Methodist Building and acquisition of the lot by the federal government.⁷⁸ The *Washington Star* described the dispute as a “contest over church property,” with Wilson and the Board opposing the will of the federal government. It later quoted Senator Keyes, Chair of the Senate Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, as stating that the government would acquire the property, but Congress took no formal action yet.⁷⁹ The *Chicago Tribune* and the *Baltimore Sun* each echoed the *Star*’s claims about government takeover of the property. The *Tribune* observed the irony that the federal government would purchase the “Methodist lobby,” a stunning reversal for a structure that was intended to represent Protestants’ influence over the government.⁸⁰

The *Christian Century* and Public Protestantism

As the rumors of a government-takeover of the Methodist Building circulated, a prominent mainline Protestant publication entered the fray, also encouraging the Board to leave Capitol Hill. The *Christian Century*, the flagship periodical of mainline Protestantism, joined the chorus of voices criticizing the Board for the Methodist Building and its assertions that

⁷⁷ House Subcommittee on Appropriations, *Legislative Appropriations Bill, 1931*, 71st Cong., 2nd sess., March 26, 1930, 92-97.

⁷⁸ “Problems of the Central Area,” Annual Report of the National Capital Planning Commission (1930): 58-61.

⁷⁹ “Methodists Meet Dec. 9 on Addition”; “Methodist Church Building May Be Acquired by U.S.,” *Washington Evening Star*, December 26, 1930. The *Congressional Record* shows that confusion over the status of the Methodist Building continued into the new year. *Cong. Rec.*, 71st Cong., 3d sess., January 24, 1931: 3075.

⁸⁰ “U.S. May Buy Methodist Building,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 28, 1930.

Protestants should actively shape federal morality legislation.⁸¹ The *Christian Century* editorial offered slightly different reasons than Senator Copeland or Congressman Tinkham for why it found the Methodist Building inappropriate. The editorial, presumably penned by editor Clayton Morrison, dismissed claims that the Board was a lobby, but suggested that the proximity of the Methodist Building to the Capitol caused unnecessary confusion and allowed the misperception to exist. “The mere presence of his headquarters at the spot where lobbying goes on is enough to keep the myth alive,” wrote the *Century*, alluding to the Copeland-Henning-Tinkham “church lobby” debate. The Board’s policy of renting apartments in the Methodist Building, which the *Christian Century* argued was simply a business policy, had produced the unintended consequence of giving the impression that the Board doled out favors to Congressmen, or tried to buy their influence in exchange for housing. The *Century* suggested the Board give up the Methodist Building not because it was a lobby, but because the site fueled misperceptions about the role Protestants sought to play in American public life. Essentially, the *Christian Century* agreed with the Board that the claims against the Methodist Building were indeed spurious and politically-motivated attacks against Prohibition, but it also concurred with the Board’s critics who called for the Building’s removal.⁸²

The thrust of the *Christian Century*’s opposition to the Methodist Building was that the Capitol Hill property distracted from the Board’s primary mission, which the *Century* defined as serving as the denominational temperance organization for the MEC. As the *Century* outlined it,

⁸¹ In her study of the *Christian Century* as the flagship periodical of mainline Protestantism, historian Elesha J. Coffman, explains that under editor Clayton Morrison, the magazine supported Prohibition and treated the 1928 election as a referendum on it. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 83–87.

⁸² “Methodist Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals: An Editorial,” *Christian Century* 47, no. 52 (December 24, 1930): 1582–85, quoted on page 1584.

the Board's responsibility was to educate Methodists on temperance and encourage abstinence from alcohol, not to assert a Protestant voice in politics. However, the *Century* suggested that by owning property and a building on Capitol Hill, the Board gave the impression that it was a lobby. The Board's practices of claiming a right to shape federal morality laws based upon a Protestant identity meant that opponents of Prohibition could easily target the Board and its Methodist Building. "No single thing has done more to create public misunderstanding as the church's relation to government than the planting of this headquarters building where it has been easy for wet propagandists to allege that the effect sought was continuous intimidation of federal legislators." The editorial discouraged the Board from its mission of public Protestantism. Instead, it advised the Board to relocate outside of Washington, D.C. and return to its original mission as a denominational temperance board, in order to end any questions over whether the board was a lobby.⁸³

The *Century's* primary criticism was not with the Methodist Building or the Board's use of it, but with how the building symbolized the Board's public Protestantism. The *Century* argued that it was inappropriate for the Board to claim it represented a specifically Protestant right to govern, because the *Century* contended that the Board was primarily the platform for one person. It viewed the organization as an opportunity for Clarence True Wilson to grandstand, and the *Voice* was a forum for him to spread his views. "Viewed from the outside, however, it is true that the activity of the Board seems to consist chiefly of the pronunciamentos from Dr. Wilson," and when anyone criticized him, the *Century* observed, he claimed the criticism was opposition

⁸³ Ibid., 1584-1585.

to Prohibition.⁸⁴ The *Century* did not call for Wilson's resignation from the post, but it did caution the MEC denomination not to cede its entire public voice on temperance to one person.

The *Christian Century* editorial, published in the final weekly issue of 1930, dovetailed with the ongoing effort by Congress to acquire the property. The concurrence of the events created a situation where the Board perceived it was under attack from all angles. The *Washington Star* continued to report on proposals for the U.S. to acquire the Methodist Building property. The Chair of the House Public Buildings and Grounds Committee, Representative Richard Elliot of Indiana, introduced a bill in the House in mid-January 1931 to purchase the blocks between the Capitol Building and Union Station. The plan called for placing the General Accounting Organization on the site of the Methodist Building.⁸⁵ In light of these two developments, the Board protected the location of its Methodist Building in order to defend its mission of public Protestantism. Given this volatile climate, it is not unsurprising that the Board devoted the entire front page of its January 1931 *Voice* issue to rebutting the *Century's* editorial. Bishop William Fraser McDowell penned the Board's reply to the *Christian Century*. As a Bishop of the MEC, McDowell held a higher level of status and authority than Wilson and Pickett did with respect to inter-denominational, mainline Protestant readers of the *Christian Century*. And, as President of the Board, McDowell also conveyed familiarity with the Board as an organization.

Bishop McDowell attempted to discredit the *Christian Century's* editorial by suggesting that the Board's mission and Wilson's leadership were denominational issues best reserved for the MEC to address internally. By making such an argument, McDowell downplayed and

⁸⁴ Ibid., 1584.

⁸⁵ "Accounting Office Site Is Proposed," *Washington Evening Star*, January 16, 1931; "Plan to Beautify D.C. Is Enlarged by Bill in House," *Washington Evening Star*, January 21, 1931.

misrepresented the Board's desire to present itself as a *Protestant* voice in politics. As an interdenominational periodical concerned with mainline Protestantism, the *Christian Century* would rightly be interested in an organization that claimed an authority to govern based upon a Protestant identity. McDowell, however, dismissed the periodical's arguments, claiming that it had no right to intervene in what was fundamentally a discussion within the MEC denomination. He felt that the editor, Morrison, was overstepping his authority and meddling in an issue that did not concern him. "It cannot assume either the rights of censorship within denominations or lordship over them," he opined. To refute the *Century's* claims that the Board served only as a platform for Wilson to grandstand, McDowell described the Board's educational work with different Methodist groups, once again emphasizing the Board as a denominational temperance organization. Like Pickett's remarks during his testimony before the Senate Lobby Committee, McDowell's statements also overemphasized the Board's educational work in order to deliberately minimize its political activities. McDowell's reply to the *Century* offers further evidence that the Board's public Protestantism had brought upon it additional scrutiny.⁸⁶

When McDowell addressed the *Christian Century's* call for the Board to abandon its Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, he also leaned heavily on the Board's identity as a denominational temperance education organization. Once again, this argument deemphasized how the Methodist Building represented the Board's public Protestantism. "There is nothing we are doing that we cannot do twenty blocks away, nothing that we could not do twenty miles away," he wrote, dismissing its location as coincidental, not integral to the Board's mission and

⁸⁶ William Fraser McDowell, "A Plain Statement by Bishop McDowell: The President of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals Answers The *Christian Century*," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, January 1931, 1.

identity.⁸⁷ He rationalized that the practice of renting apartments was not to pressure Congressmen into adopting the Board's views, but simply good business sense, brushing away any claims of impropriety. McDowell described how the surrounding area was mainly vacant lots or small, private properties at the time of purchase in 1917, and only recently had the landscape changed with the construction of new federal buildings, like the Supreme Court Building. While this narrative of Capitol Hill is factually accurate, McDowell's history misrepresented the significance that the Board attributed to the site of their property, as chapters one and two illustrate. When the Board first purchase the property in 1917, the *Voice* displayed the lot on a map of Washington, D.C. in order to highlight how close the Board's building would be to federal government buildings, illustrating the influence the Board sought to cultivate.⁸⁸ The fundraising and advertising for the Methodist Building emphasized its proximity to the Capitol, which McDowell also emphasized at the cornerstone-laying ceremony in 1923, when he said, "We lay this cornerstone of a new building to be erected in the sight of the Capitol as a pledge to our loyalty to and cooperation with the government."⁸⁹ From the initial purchase of property, extending through the fundraising and construction, evidence shows that the Board intended the Methodist Building to symbolize its aspirations for public Protestantism. McDowell's retelling of the building's history not only downplayed the public influence the Board sought, but suggests an attempt to hide or obscure its ambitions to shape American public life.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2

⁸⁸ J. P. Jarvis, "The Circle and Arrow Indicate the Lot Just Purchased by the Board on Which a Building Will Be Erected to Be a Center of Temperance and Methodist Activities," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, May 1917.

⁸⁹ "Cornerstone of Methodist Building at Nation's Capital Is Laid," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, February 1923, 1.

Yet while McDowell embraced the Board's denominational identity in order to dispute the *Christian Century's* allegations, he also rejected the *Century's* parameters for denominations. McDowell found the *Christian Century* editorial distressing when it called for the Board to involve itself only in internal affairs and education within the MEC. "To the Methodist Board, the slow and inconspicuous process of education within the denomination has long since become a secondary task," opined the *Century*. "The field of its operations has become, not its church, but the national political arena," it wrote, critical of the Board's mission of public Protestantism.⁹⁰ Like Wilson and Pickett, McDowell understood the Board's leadership in American public life as emerging out of Methodist theology and history. McDowell framed the Board and the Methodist Building as products of this theological tradition. "If anybody imagines that the removal of our building, our 'getting off the hill' is equivalent to withdrawing the pressure for righteousness in public life that the Methodist Episcopal Church has historically exerted, he simply does not understand that Church," McDowell wrote. He argued that the *Century* was shortsighted to suggest that the Board only conduct temperance education within its own denomination because that was not consistent with Methodist theology. Instead, McDowell argued that Methodist history and theology informed the Board's public Protestantism.⁹¹ McDowell's comments reveal, much like Wilson's previous comments did, that the crux of the conflict over the Methodist Building, both with the *Christian Century* and with Congress, pivoted over how various people interpreted public Protestantism and who each believed could claim to speak for Protestants. Based upon their reading of Methodist history, Board leaders interpreted the organization's mission to promote Prohibition and public morals among the entire

⁹⁰ "Methodist Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals: An Editorial:" 1583.

⁹¹ McDowell, "A Plain Statement by Bishop McDowell," *The Voice*, 2.

American population, which was why a Capitol Hill building was valuable. External observers argued that the Board overstepped its bounds and its Methodist Building provided evidence that the Board lobbied, or at least courted unnecessary controversy.⁹²

The *Christian Century* found McDowell's arguments about Methodist theology and history an unpersuasive explanation for the Board's public Protestantism.⁹³ While Patrick Ward of the NCWC had questioned whether Protestant values were representative of American values when he had criticized the Board, the *Century* questioned whether the Board and the Methodist Building were representative of Protestantism. Writing a second editorial, in March 1931, the *Christian Century* had learned of Congressional proposals to acquire the Methodist Building property, and the *Christian Century* took this opportunity to comment on why it felt it was wise the Methodist Building and the Board would no longer be on Capitol Hill. In a softer tone than its previous editorial, the *Century* conceded that the decision of where to relocate the organization and the building was a denominational matter, however, the interdenominational periodical felt obliged to weigh in because the decision affected all Protestants, not just the MEC, refuting McDowell's charge that the *Century* was meddling. In the *Century*'s estimation, the Board and its Methodist Building concerned other mainline Protestants because of the

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Before this March editorial, the *Christian Century* published a short reply to McDowell's editorial, questioning the authorship of the piece. The editorial insinuated that Wilson actually wrote the essay and appended McDowell's name to add legitimacy, further substantiation of the *Christian Century*'s claims that the Board was a soapbox for Wilson. Archival evidence on the matter is scant, with neither Wilson nor McDowell having correspondence about the Board response to the editorial. However, they did work in the same building a floor apart, so it is historically plausible. "Bishop McDowell's Name and the Methodist Board Statement," *Christian Century* 48, no. 5 (February 4, 1931): 157; "A Plain Statement by Bishop McDowell," *Christian Century* 48, no. 5 (February 4, 1931): 186–87.

relationship it established between church, the state and politics.⁹⁴

The *Christian Century* suggested that the Methodist Building was dangerous because it confused churches with political parties. Having previously not considered the Board a lobby, the *Century* reversed its opinion in the second editorial, taking McDowell's denial in the *Voice* as confirmation that the Board was in fact a lobby. The editorial suggested that the bold role the Board claimed for Protestants in American public life actually set a precedent that could allow for Catholic involvement in national affairs. The *Century* argued that it was imperative that Protestants maintain fidelity to the separation of church and state so that they would hold a higher moral position from which they could criticize Catholics, who they believed intermingled the two. "Protestantism must be in a position to bear its testimony without apology and without constraint," the *Century* wrote. "But it cannot come into court with clean hands if in the meantime it has followed a course like the Methodist board has marked out." It was necessary for Protestants to refrain from engaging in politics in order to challenge Catholics "if and when" the Roman Catholic Church attempted to influence politics. For this reason, the editorial described the Board and its Methodist Building as a "wedge." By establishing a headquarters on Capitol Hill, the Board had entered the political fray, therefore inviting other churches to do the same. It encouraged the Board to relocate its headquarters outside the boundaries of Washington, D.C. in order to avoid any more confusion and prevent any further Protestant involvement in politics.⁹⁵ The Board's public Protestantism was dangerous because its participation in politics actually imperiled the status of the Protestant establishment by providing an opening for Catholics to enter politics.

⁹⁴ "The Methodists at Washington: An Editorial," *Christian Century* 45, no. 9 (March 4, 1931): 294–96.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Renewed Building Plans and a Restrained Identity, 1931

The *Christian Century* editorials, in combination with government efforts to acquire the Methodist Building property, raised the stakes of building the apartment annex. In the months following the *Christian Century* editorials, the Board continued to press for the building addition because constructing the apartment building would rebuke its critics. The new building would represent how the Board would not be cowed by critics of its public Protestantism. Further investment and development in its property demonstrated that the Board did not find it necessary to leave Washington. The addition also demonstrated that the Board deemed criticism of its rental policy unfounded. At the same time, subtle, yet significant adjustments to the construction plan suggested that the new building would also symbolize a softening of the Board's public Protestantism.

The Board's persistent dedication to building was not the only significant development after the *Christian Century* editorial and Senate Lobby Committee; the construction plan had also shifted. By late April 1931, a portion of the Board's executive committee met informally in Wilson's office in the Methodist Building to discuss plans for the apartment annex.⁹⁶ The *Washington Star* had reported that amidst ongoing speculation of government acquisition of the Board's property, the Board had submitted a smaller, scaled-back version of the apartment building for approval by the D.C. Zoning Commission.⁹⁷ The executive committee minutes from May 22, 1931 confirm the restrained building ambitions of the Board. Wilson "set forth the

⁹⁶ Executive committee minutes, April 24, 1931, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁹⁷ "Methodists Plan Apartment House," *Washington Evening Star*, April 24, 1931; "M.E. Property Near Capitol to Be Bought by U.S.," *Washington Evening Star*, April 25, 1931; "U. S. Intends to Acquire Private Land Near Capitol: Lynn and Grant Correct Announcement of Methodists' Plans," *New York Herald Tribune*, April 26, 1931.

difficulties during the last two years with the Zoning Commission and told in detail concerning the opposition that had arisen,” and informed the executive committee that the best way to overcome the obstacles was to construct a smaller building, at the prescribed height of 60 feet. He rationalized that the lower height would save construction costs while still providing significant revenue for the Board.⁹⁸ The CFA, which had so reluctantly agreed to approve a 72-foot height exemption, sanctioned the 60-foot version at a July 1931 meeting, but not before noting that “the Methodist Church people, represented by Dr. True Wilson, are no longer able financially nor willing to build to a height of 72 feet even though the Zoning Commission would permit it.” The CFA correlated the shorter height to lowered ambitions.⁹⁹

However, Board members understood their decision to continue building at any height as a defiant rebuke to the *Century*, Congress, and the government commissions that had thwarted the organization in various ways for the past year. When the Board filed plans for the modified, 60-foot apartment building in early June 1931, Board leaders celebrated this as a triumph over their adversaries.¹⁰⁰ The *Baltimore Sun*, for example, included a statement from board member Rev. Dr. Benjamin W. Meeks, who described the apartment building as a victory over the Board’s most trenchant critics. “In spite of the fact that we were requested by a little group of editors from the well-named Windy City to get off Capitol Hill,” said Meeks, obliquely referring to *Christian Century* editorials, “and a little later commanded not only to get off the hill but get out of Washington, we are still there and going strong.”¹⁰¹ And later that month, even the

⁹⁸ Executive committee minutes, May 22, 1931, page 1, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁹⁹ Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, July 8, 1931, CFA Records.

¹⁰⁰ “Methodists File Building Plans,” *Washington Evening Star*, June 5, 1931.

¹⁰¹ The triumph of this moment was particularly strong for Meeks, who had only joined the Board at the annual meeting in December 1930, when the fate of the apartment annex was most

Christian Advocate, the weekly periodical for the MEC, also included a short, celebratory news item about the construction of the apartment building process beginning. Though the *Advocate* did not mention the challenges the Board had faced, the periodical also celebrated this as a triumphant victory, creating a source of income and providing for the financial stability of the Methodist Building's future.¹⁰² And in the October 1931 issue of the *Voice*, a little more than a month before the new apartment building was scheduled to open, the Board claimed victory. "Those who worked so strenuously to prevent its erection or to handicap its construction accomplished nothing, except the reduction of twelve feet lower than the present building," wrote Pickett in a brief paragraph on the apartment building.¹⁰³ The *Star*, reporting on the announcement in the *Voice*, said the announcement "offset rumors that the Federal Government had condemned the Methodist Building."¹⁰⁴

While the Board publicly celebrated the construction of the apartment building as a symbolic endorsement of its mission to claim a Protestant right to govern, the private Board records suggest that the Board also grappled with a sense of retreat. Wilson's building report at the 1931 annual meeting recounted the past few years of controversy over the Methodist Building with exhaustion and frustration. The past year had been a "year of unusual interest in our building affairs," Wilson said, hinting at the combination of the lobby investigation, construction height restrictions, calls to leave Washington, and threats of government acquisition. "Every possible obstruction was thrown in our way by an official of the Government

in doubt. "Methodist House Is Being Enlarged," *Baltimore Sun*, June 6, 1931. Annual minutes, December 9, 1930, page 2, Minutes, 1912-1933, GBCS Administrative Records.

¹⁰² "Enlarging Methodist Building in Washington, D.C.," *Christian Advocate*, June 11, 1931, 766.

¹⁰³ "The New Building Nearly Completed," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, October 1931.

¹⁰⁴ "New M.E. Building Nearing Completion," *Washington Evening Star*, November 7, 1931.

who managed to block any change in the zoning law,” Wilson said in her address, revealing a level of candor about her frustrations that the Board did not publicly display. Although the *Voice* that month proudly announced that the new apartment building was nearly filled with tenants, Wilson also privately disclosed to the Board managers the serious trouble she had securing tenants for the new building. She suspected that other Washington apartment buildings experienced a similar challenge under the financial strains of the Great Depression, but she suggested that the Board had an even more challenging time signing tenants because of the articles in the press that fueled speculation of an impending government acquisition of the Methodist Building.¹⁰⁵

Her candid report reveals how the Board continued to turn to the Methodist Building and the new apartment building to represent its religious mission, but the Board’s discussion of the apartment building addition also suggests the beginning of efforts to soften its image. The completion of the apartment building provided the Board with the opportunity to downplay its assertive public Protestant identity. Just as Board leaders resigned themselves to a separate, shorter apartment building rather than the original plan for an expansion of the original Methodist Building, the Board also began to pivot toward portraying a more restrained, less overtly political identity, with scaled back ambitions. The last-minute change in name for the new apartment building illustrates this shift. As late as July, the architectural blueprints for the new apartment building called it the “Congressional,” a naming practice common among

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, “Eighth Annual Building Report,” January 14, 1932, Reports: General Secretary’s annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson’s annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection. The 1931 annual meeting was delayed until January 1932. “A Momentous Board Meeting,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, February 1932. Architectural historian James Goode confirmed that apartment building construction in Washington halted during the Great Depression. Even two luxury apartment buildings that had been planned and financed before the 1929 crash were only half-completed by 1931. Goode, *Best Addresses*, 190-191, 324.

Washington apartment buildings in the interwar period. Goode notes that Anglophone names, such as “Albemarle” or “York,” were popular during the 1920s, though other apartment buildings took European or North African cities, Native American tribes, or states of the Union as their names. (Goode also quipped that “usually the grander the name, the less pretentious the apartment house. The proposed Congressional, with its modest one-bedroom and studio apartments, would have conformed to this latter trend.¹⁰⁶) But by the time of the apartment annex opened in December, the Board had dropped the building’s name, calling it simply by its address, 110 Maryland Avenue NE. Having faced allegations of being a lobby and of inappropriate use of the “Methodist Building” on Capitol Hill, the Board decided not to court more controversy with naming its new building the Congressional. “We wanted to call the new building, when finished, the Congressional,” Wilson conceded to the managers in her annual report, “but it was decided not to emphasize either our relations to church or state.”¹⁰⁷ By opting to name the new building by its address, the Board deliberately and intentionally distanced itself from its earlier embrace of public Protestantism. The new building demonstrated the Board’s persistent presence in Washington, but it also illustrated the Board performing a more restrained, less overt Protestant identity. The name choice of the new building demonstrates a softening of the Board’s public Protestantism.

Conclusion

Even though the Board still advocated for Protestant values in shaping federal morality legislation, the Board’s decision to shy away from naming its new building the Congressional began its gradual, but significant, shift towards embracing a quieter, more restrained identity.

¹⁰⁶ Goode, *Best Addresses*, 189–190.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, “Eighth Annual Building Report,” January 14, 1932.

This pivot only accelerated with the impending repeal of Prohibition and the Eighteenth Amendment in 1933. The new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt desired to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment in the hopes that alcohol consumption would help to stimulate the economy during Depression. Just before Roosevelt's inauguration, Congress introduced the Twenty-First Amendment in February 1933, which would repeal Prohibition, and void the Eighteenth Amendment.¹⁰⁸ During his first 100 days, President Roosevelt signed the so-called "Beer Bill," which permitted alcohol sales of up to four percent alcohol by volume.¹⁰⁹ The Board mobilized for another political campaign to save Prohibition, with Wilson writing to Roosevelt in May, pleading not to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment but rather to enforce it.¹¹⁰ Pickett published about the dangers of repeal, urging MEC members to reject the amendment at state ratifying conventions, but to little avail. By November 1933, the Board had effectively lost the fight. Admitting defeat, Wilson told the *Washington Post*, "The Methodist Church is getting out of politics." Having seen their majorities shrink and now facing a President whose positions on alcohol were much different than the Board's, Wilson said the Board would return to a role more in line with its original identity as a denominational temperance organization. "We are going to do what the newspapers have so long urged us to do. We are going to stress the moral side of the liquor question," he said.¹¹¹

By stressing "the moral side" and shedding its political ambitions, the Board began to downplay its public Protestantism. Rather continue political advocacy based upon a Protestant

¹⁰⁸ David E. Kyvig, *Repealing National Prohibition* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000), 157–158.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 172–178

¹¹⁰ Clarence True Wilson to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, May 1933, Correspondence, 1933, Wilson Collection.

¹¹¹ "M.E. Church to Quit Politics in Liquor Fight: Dr. Wilson Reveals Plan to Wage Battle from Moral Angle," *Washington Post*, November 11, 1933.

identity, the image it projected throughout the 1920s and especially during the 1928 Presidential election, the Board decided after repeal to stress education about alcohol. “The activities of our Board have largely been centered on government and law, but we must now make a new approach to the age-old problem of alcoholism,” stated the Board’s report, explaining that education needed to be its top priority, especially educating children. Significantly, the Board did not stop advocating for Protestant Christian definitions of morality, only the means of that advocacy shifted from politics to education.¹¹²

Since the original intent of the Methodist Building was to honor the Protestant victory of Prohibition and to symbolize the Board’s mission to promote Protestant Christianity morality in American public life, the confluence of repeal and the new apartment building enabled the Board to soften and refashion its image. At the same time that the Board focused more on its educational mission, it cultivated a gentler reputation as offering a home to Washington residents.¹¹³ The new apartment annex helped give the Methodist Building and the Board a new image in light of the changed political situation. As a landlord, the Board projected a domestic image of caring for the hard-working, dedicated people of Washington. “We try to keep a homelike atmosphere about our buildings,” Wilson reported to the managers in her annual report as Building Secretary. She repeatedly shared in her building reports that she scrutinized the moral character of applicants, implying that one criterion for selection was alcohol consumption. Just as the Board had interpreted advocacy for Prohibition and other public morals as an

¹¹² “The Board of Temperance Reorganizes and Moves Forward,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, November 1933.

¹¹³ “Rooms and Board: The Methodist Building,” *Washington Evening Star*, May 17, 1933; “Apartments-Unfurnished: Methodist Building,” *Washington Evening Star*, April 23, 1933; “Methodist Building, Large, 2 Bed Room Apartment,” *Washington Evening Star*, October 27, 1935.

expression of Methodist social theology, its apartments became another way to promote Protestant Christian morality, although in a different manner.¹¹⁴ After the repeal of Prohibition, the apartment building helped the Board refashion itself as caretaker of Washington and as a temperance education organization. In light of the Board's shift away from public Protestantism, why a denominational temperance organization needed a Capitol Hill building that still carried a large mortgage was a question that the MEC and the soon-to-be reunited Methodist Church would address.

¹¹⁴ Wilson, "Ninth Annual Building Report," December 14, 1932, Reports: General Secretary's annual reports/ Mrs. Wilson's annual reports, 1913-1924, Wilson Collection.

Chapter Four: Uniting a National Church in the Nation's Capital: The Future of the Methodist Building and the Board in the Methodist Church, 1934-1936

Introduction

In June 1934, Bishop William Fraser McDowell, now retired from serving as Bishop of Washington and as President of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals, invited several well-connected Methodists to his Washington residence for breakfast. As representatives from the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS), and Methodist Protestant Church (MPC) shared breakfast in McDowell's home in the affluent Northwest Washington, D.C. Kalorama neighborhood, McDowell urged the leaders of the three predominately white Methodist churches to start reunion talks in earnest. By the conclusion of the breakfast meeting, the representatives had agreed to formally start reunion negotiations in August 1934, meeting in Chicago.¹ Several years before, in January 1932, McDowell had convened a similar meeting between the three churches in his office in the Methodist Building, encouraging "our General Conferences of 1932 and 1934 to take definite steps for union of the three Churches." Both the MEC and MECS authorized reunion negotiations at the 1932 and 1934 meetings.²

Each time, McDowell achieved the outcomes he desired, pushing forward his cause for unification. McDowell was highly respected in American Methodism, as sources on reunion reveal, but the importance of the Washington, D.C. location should not be overlooked. In both meetings, the national capital symbolized to white Methodists the transcendence of the nation's

¹ Edwin Holt Hughes, *I Was Made a Minister, an Autobiography* (New York, Nashville, Abingdon, Cokesbury, 1943), 278; Harry Earl Woolever, *The Highroad of Methodism: The Heights of Separation and Union* (Washington, D.C: Commission on Methodist Union, 1939), 37–38.

² The MPC had endorsed reunion in 1928. Woolever, *The Highroad of Methodism*, 37.

North-South sectional divides, and Washington served as a parable for a united Methodist church. Bishop Edwin Holt Hughes, who succeeded McDowell as the Bishop of Washington (and President of the Board) in 1932, made this point, stating that Washington, D.C. was an ideal setting for reunion talks because it was removed from sectionalism.³ Furthermore, McDowell's use of the Methodist Building, located across from the Capitol with its mutually applicable name, likely epitomized the national ambitions for a reunited national Methodism.

At the June 1934 breakfast meeting, McDowell argued for Methodist reunion in the language of public Protestantism, suggesting a national Methodist church would exert more influence in American public life. He said, "I have a feeling that Christ is not getting a fair chance in Methodism in America in its present divided condition, and I am ready to enter into a movement whereby our three Churches will be brought together."⁴ In the context of Methodist reunion, Hughes, McDowell, and Clarence True Wilson—those associated with the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals—leveraged the Methodist Building as the representation of their understanding of public Protestantism in order to articulate their visions for the future of American Methodism. Wilson proposed that the now-completed, yet still indebted, Methodist Building become the headquarters of the new national Methodist Church as a symbolic way for the new church to embrace public Protestantism as its core identity. In a moment of uncertainty about the future of the church, Wilson advocated that Methodist identity center on a historical theology of Methodist social reform and temperance advocacy.

At the same time the three predominately white Methodist churches held negotiations about achieving reunion, the MEC also looked to the future of the church by creating a

³ Hughes, *I Was Made a Minister, an Autobiography*, 127–128.

⁴ Ibid.

commission to study and restructure church government and bureaucracy. Among those entities affected by the commission's plan was the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals, which would become a subsidiary of the Board of Education. The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 pressed the MEC to reevaluate if, and how, to continue temperance advocacy. Facing pressure to merge, Wilson and the Board used the Methodist Building as a symbol of the future of American Methodism in order to argue for the Board's independence in the new church. By describing the Methodist Building as the site where Methodists worked to influence American public life based on a Protestant identity, Wilson and the Board framed the Board's independence in the new national church as a continuous expression of the Methodist commitment to social reform theology. However, the choice not to expand the role of the Methodist Building in the new national church, only retaining it for its extant purpose, signaled a transformation in Methodist understandings of public Protestantism, opting for a more subdued role.

When the Methodist Building becomes the point of departure to analyze Methodist reunion, it is evident that Methodist deliberations over the scope of church bureaucracy became a forum to discuss race, national identity, theology, and the future of American Methodism in the twentieth century. The focus on the Board and its Methodist Building to explore questions of Methodist identity suggests that boards, which were so often maligned by MEC churchgoers (and historians) as unrelated to the conference system of Methodist theology and governance, actually embodied the central paradoxes of twentieth-century Methodist reunion.⁵

⁵ Though denominational societies in Methodism date to the middle of the nineteenth century, and developed into full-fledged bureaucratic entities in the period under study in this dissertation, they were often maligned precisely for their bureaucracy. As historian Frederick Norwood notes, the Board of Temperance received some opposition within the MEC not for its objective, but for its growing bureaucracy. When read alongside historian Russell Richey's work, who suggests

Race and Reunion in American Methodism

The June 1934 breakfast meeting in McDowell's residence represented the latest attempt of decades of reunion efforts between the MEC and MECS. The two churches split in 1844 over differences over slavery, but since the early twentieth century the two churches entertained aspirations of reunion.⁶ The MEC and MECS started moving closer to each other after the Civil War, authoring shared hymnbooks and later sending bishops to extend greetings to the other church's General Conferences.⁷ As Morris L. Davis explained, the ambition to fashion a national church that would play a central role in American life inspired Methodist reunion plans. Davis described this ambition for influence in American public life as "Christian nationalism," though it bears significant resemblance to my definition of public Protestantism. He adds that such aspirations for Methodist leadership were inextricable from white supremacy, because the leaders of the MEC and MECS found no contradiction between national prominence and the practice of segregation. The plans for the unified church would unite white Methodists into a national body while segregating African American members of the MEC and MECS.⁸

that Boards in Methodism reflect the centralizing, national of the 1939 reunion, it is evident a gap exists in the literature about how Boards reveal the tensions and central themes of Methodist reunion. Frederick Abbott Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism; a History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 349; Russell E. Richey, "Connectionalism: End or New Beginning," in *Questions for the Twenty-First Century Church*, ed. Russell E. Richey, William B. Lawrence, Dennis M. Campbell (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 317.

⁶ The General Conference of the MEC required that Bishop James Andrew desist ownership; the South found this unacceptable and formed the breakaway MECS. Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 1930-1975* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 16.

⁷ Morris L. Davis, *The Methodist Unification Christianity and the Politics of the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 4-5; Cannon, James, "Remarks of Bishop James Cannon," *Daily Christian Advocate* XX, no. 14 (May 16, 1924): 386.

⁸ Davis, *Methodist Unification*, 6-8. African Americans found Methodism appealing since the revivals of the eighteenth century, commonly called the "Great Awakening." Methodism became an important organizing site for black religious life and expression in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with black Methodists joining together to join independent black

The nearly quarter century aspiration for reunion meant that the Methodists meeting at McDowell's residence did not start from scratch. The MEC and MECS first seriously engaged in reunion negotiations from 1916 to 1920, producing a plan of union, though it did not garner the two-thirds of votes needed in each church to pass. The plan called for creating five regional areas—called jurisdictions—for white Methodists and one nationwide jurisdiction for black Methodists in order to avoid the possibility of black bishops supervising white ministers and congregations. Under the new structure, the jurisdictions would be responsible for electing bishops, thus preserving a degree of regional independence in the new national denomination. When reunion talks resumed over a decade later, the 1934-1936 negotiations used the 1920 plan as a basis for their work. The 1930s plan drew upon many of the features of the 1920 plan, including a delicate balance between centralizing the church in a national body and preserving regional autonomy, including the regional white jurisdictions and the segregated, nationwide black jurisdiction.⁹ In his memoir of the 1934 to 1936 reunion meetings, Bishop John Moore (formerly of the MECS) wrote that “the jurisdictional system would give protection, promotion, and efficiency in administration, cultivation, and development to all sections and interests of a

denominations in the face of discrimination. In Philadelphia, Richard Allen led the black Methodists to leave St. George's MEC in 1787 after being relegated to sit in the balcony, forming Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (1794) and the African Episcopal Church of St Thomas (1792). In New York, James Varick and Peter Williams also led black Methodists from John Street MEC in 1796 to form the independent Zion Methodist Church. By 1816, Allen organized black Methodist churches to form the first black denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and because of conflicts, Varick led Zion Church to organize another black denomination, the AME Zion Church, in 1821. Davis, *Methodist Unification*, 4. Judith Weisenfeld, “Religion in African American History,” *American History: Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3-6, <http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-24>.

⁹ Davis, *Methodist Unification*, 5.

great nation-wide Church,” adding that the Northern branch preferred more centralized control of church bureaucracies, while the Southern branch opted for more regional independence.¹⁰

As with the 1920 plan, racial segregation proved to be the most divisive part of unification negotiations in the 1930s. White advocates of reunion frequently spoke in grandiose platitudes celebrating the public leadership that the new church could exert, as McDowell’s remarks suggest the new church would become the largest Protestant church in the United States. Yet as Davis has observed, racial segregation was consistent with Methodist aspirations for national leadership. Hughes, reflecting on the segregation in the Plan of Union wrote, “Our commission was not set to remake the Church, but to reunite the Church,” placing national reunion over ending segregated practices, which he opted to call “reform.”¹¹ In the original plan, the MECS proposed organizing all black Methodists in the new church into an “Associate General Conference,” which would be a separate body from the all-white Methodist church. This idea bore resemblance to the MECS’ relationship with the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, which was affiliated with the MECS but separated by race. Black MEC members, including those at the reunion talks, vigorously denounced this relationship, and compromised with creation of the “Colored Jurisdiction,” which would be a segregated entity of all black Methodists. Unlike the earlier proposal, they would receive representation at General Conference, although black delegates were capped at no more than five percent. By contrast, the white Methodists would be organized into five geographical bodies, also called “Jurisdictions,” within the U.S. This plan, presented in 1920, faltered because the MECS was anxious about African American representation to General Conference and because the MEC was skeptical

¹⁰ John Monroe Moore, *The Long Road to Methodist Union*, (New York, Nashville, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), 125.

¹¹ Hughes, *I Was Made a Minister*, 281.

about the dispersal of authority to regional jurisdictions.¹² The 1935 plan called for the creation of a segregated Central Jurisdiction, which subsumed all black Methodists in the MEC and MECS, but provided them representation at the new church's General Conferences. According to Moore, the Northern branch again expressed aversion to the segregated Central Jurisdiction, preferring that black Methodists and their churches be absorbed into the jurisdictions they were regionally located. Conversely, the Southern branch expressed fear over black representation at General Conference and the General Conference's power to dissolve jurisdictions.¹³

When the MEC General Conference met to vote on the reunion plan in 1936, the primary opposition to the reunion plan was segregation. The Central Jurisdiction was the only aspect of the Plan of Union debated at the General Conference.¹⁴ African American delegates denounced the plan's segregation, explaining it was hypocritical. Mary McLeod Bethune, the educator, civil rights advocate, and adviser to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt spoke out against the Plan of Union, urging fellow delegates to recognize that the plan for Methodist reunion was at the expense of African Americans. "It seems to me that while we are all so anxious for this united church to do a greater and more efficient job for God and for humanity," she said, "it seems to me that the progress of the Negro race has made in their cultural development, in their contribution to the great Christian Church, is being penalized now when we are to be set aside for whatever reason you may have in your minds." For the sake of future black children, she told the General Conference that she could not support the Plan of Union.¹⁵ Tellingly, while the Plan

¹² Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 34–35.

¹³ Moore, *The Long Road to Methodist Union*, 198–199.

¹⁴ *Daily Christian Advocate* XXIII, no. 4 (May 5, 1936): 85–92.

¹⁵ Mary McLeod Bethune, *Daily Christian Advocate* XXIII, no. 4 (May 5, 1936): 90.

of Union passed the MEC by 470-83, only 11 of the 47 black delegates voted for the proposal.¹⁶ Yet, in his memoir, Hughes dismissed their critiques, writing, “The actual discussion of the race problem was neither lengthy nor prominent.”¹⁷

The reunion plan with the MECS and MPC remained largely silent on the structure of Boards, only stating that they would exist as part of the bureaucracy of the new national church.¹⁸ This ambiguity enabled the leaders of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals to capitalize on the aspirations for national influence that motivated the Methodist reunion effort, and claim that the Board and its Methodist Building best represented the goals of public Protestantism. This was not a new claim for the Wilson and the Board: since moving to Washington, Wilson openly expressed his hopes of the Board exercising national influence. And, as early as 1925, when the Methodist Building had just opened, Wilson expressed his desire that the new building would become the center of the future Methodist Church. “If the union of the two Churches, North and South, shall go through as scheduled, there will be no difference of opinion as to where its location should be. It will come to Washington for its headquarters and want our building as its center.”¹⁹ In the midst of reunion negotiations, Wilson once again leveraged the Methodist Building as the symbolic center for public Protestantism in the national capital in order to fight off a separate plan that would have consolidated the Board of Temperance with the Board of Education.

¹⁶ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 41–42. *Daily Christian Advocate* XXIII, no. 4 (May 5, 1936): 92.

¹⁷ Hughes, *I Was Made a Minister*, 281.

¹⁸ Moore, *The Long Road to Methodist Union*, 125–126.

¹⁹ Clarence True Wilson, “The Story of the Methodist Building in Washington, D.C.,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, March 1925.

Board Merger Plans and the Context of Reunion

At roughly the same time that McDowell held the breakfast meeting to urge the church leaders to reunite, a separate group met to discuss restructuring the bureaucratic structure of the MEC. The 1932 MEC General Conference authorized the formation of a new commission “regarding the total supervisional and connectional agencies of the church,” suggesting an appetite for structural reform existed within the church as reunion became more likely. The duty of the Commission on Supervisional System was to research the current bureaucratic structure of the MEC and recommend changes to its organization, including, but not limited to, the boards of the church.²⁰ As far as extant records suggest, the Commission began its work in earnest in 1934, and developed questions it wanted the MEC members to answer.²¹ In the February 15 issue of the *Christian Advocate*, the Commission published the resolution with its stated purpose and a list of questions to which it solicited answers. The questions addressed a range of topics, including the election of bishops, the organization of conferences, the creation of a judicial body, reasons for membership decline in local churches, and the overall mission and ministry of the church. Those specific to boards asked readers to consider alternate forms of organization: “Is it possible to classify these responsibilities under such general heads as Missionary, Educational, and Philanthropic?” The Commission further asked how many, how large, and how should its members and chief executives be selected. Curiously, the question did not use the word “board” at all, preferring the phrase “connectional program,” perhaps in order to inspire the readers to

²⁰ *Daily Christian Advocate*, XXIII, no. 23, (May 24, 1932): 599. The Commission had started as a body to study the Episcopacy, but was expanded to include the entire MEC bureaucracy.

²¹ “Commission on Supervisional System: Under the Chairmanship of Dr. L.C. Wright,” *Christian Advocate*, February 1, 1934, 108.

brainstorm alternate organizational structures.²² Apparently, the voluntary survey did not elicit the desired number or quality of responses, but as is customary with voluntary surveys, only those holding extremes of opinion were motivated to fill out the survey without incentive. Twice the Commission sent additional pleas for more, and more thoughtful responses.²³

The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 likely informed the Commission's deliberations, as the final plan, released in November 1935, proposed to consolidate the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals with the Board of Education. This proposal subordinated the temperance board under the authority of education, as its language in the proposal suggests: "A Board of Christian Education, in which the Board of Temperance shall be included."²⁴ (The Commission also recommended to consolidate several of the boards, reducing the total number from six to three. The Board of Foreign Missions would now also encompass the Women's Foreign Missionary Society as an auxiliary, and the new Board of Home Service would include both the former Board of Home Missions and Church Extension and the Board of Hospitals and Homes.) The Commission elaborated on its rationale, explaining that the new Board of Christian Education "would be responsible for the supervision, direction, and administration of the affairs, work, responsibilities, and activities of the Board of Education and the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals."²⁵ Just as the Home Missions and Hospitals Boards each provided social services in the U.S., and Women's Foreign Missions and the Board of Foreign

²² Louis C. Wright, "What Are Your Answers?" *Christian Advocate*, February 15, 1934, 148–149.

²³ "Editorial: The Questionnaires," *Christian Advocate*, May 3, 1934, 540; "Who Cares for Questionnaires?" *Christian Advocate*, October 11, 1934, 828.

²⁴ "Streamlining the Church," *Christian Advocate*, November 7, 1935, 996; Louis C. Wright, "A Study of the Supervisional System," *Christian Advocate*, November 7, 1935, 1002–1003.

²⁵ Louis C. Wright, "A Study of the Supervisional System," *Christian Advocate*, November 14, 1935, 1024–1025.

Missions each evangelized abroad, the Commission paired Temperance and Education because of a common purpose in teaching the members of the MEC.

The Commission proposal implied that the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals had transitioned to an agenda of temperance education. It concluded that the MEC attention to temperance and alcohol fell under the purview of the Board of Christian Education. Neither the Board nor the MEC wavered in their commitment to temperance, but the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment with the ratification of the Twenty-First Amendment by December 1933 represented a significant setback.²⁶ Repeal represented a symbolic defeat for the Board: the organization had moved to Washington to advocate for national Prohibition, and subsequently constructed the Methodist Building to celebrate its passage as a Protestant cultural victory. In a special meeting held on November 9, 1933, the Board managers conceded this, and adopted a report that called for a renewed focus on producing educational material about alcoholism, and even encouraged collaboration with the Board of Education.²⁷

Even before the Commission convened and before Congress repealed Prohibition, the MEC had considered the future of the Board under possible repeal. At the 1932 General Conference, despite adopting an unapologetic statement of support for Prohibition, the body evaluated several proposals to reorganize the Board. The New York East Conference found the

²⁶ The movement to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment traces its origins back to almost immediately after its ratification in 1919, however the political effort to repeal Prohibition developed after the 1932 election. With huge wins for Democrats and a new Democratic president, Congress moved quickly to pass a new constitutional amendment, what would become the Twenty-First Amendment, effectively rendering the Eighteenth Amendment null and void. Both houses of Congress passed the amendment by the end of February 1933, and ratification conventions started meeting in April. By November 1933, ratification was virtually guaranteed, and repeal was official by December. David E. Kyvig, *Repealing National Prohibition* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000), 171–178.

²⁷ “The Board of Temperance Reorganizes and Moves Forward,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, November 1933.

focus on temperance and prohibition as outdated, and proposed a new name that would shift the focus to the Board's third title of "Public Morals." This mission still embraced public

Protestantism, as the New York East Conference wanted to the Board to focus on its already stated mission "to create a Christian public sentiment that will relate the Gospel of Christ to the economic, political, industrial and social relations of life." This had been the stated mission for the Board since the 1920 *Book of Discipline*, passed by the same body a dozen years earlier.²⁸

The Newark Conference, an African American conference in the MEC, echoed New York East's recommendation for a name change, submitting an identical resolution. Such a response to the Board's portfolio was not unique to the Newark Conference, but rather repeatedly expressed by black Methodists and in the black press. Black Methodists strongly supported temperance and Prohibition just like white Methodists, and many black conferences, including the Washington Conference, gave funds to construct the Methodist Building, but they also questioned why "public morals" did not include more discussion of lynching.²⁹ However, the General Conference voted to keep the name and portfolio the consistent. Pickett, who delivered the 1931 annual report in Wilson's stead while he was recovering from an illness, opined that to dissolve the MEC's temperance board when Prohibition faced repeal would give the impression that the church was abandoning its commitment to temperance.³⁰

²⁸ "Methodists Get Plea to Rename Morals Board," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 1, 1932; "Change Name of Board of Temperance, Etc.," Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, 1932, General Conference Records, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey; Methodist Episcopal Church et al., *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1920*. (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920), § 490.

²⁹ "M.E. Temperance Board Head Flayed for Dodging the Lynching Issue," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 16, 1932.

³⁰ "A Momentous Board Meeting," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, February 1932.

Although the Commission's proposal did not mention the repeal of Prohibition, the connection between the Education and Temperance Boards implied that after repeal, temperance was now an educational mission, no longer a political one. By framing temperance as an educational cause, and consolidating the Temperance Board with the Education Board, the Commission also removed the burden from the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals for representing the MEC's ambitions for national influence or advocating laws based upon Protestant Christian morality. The Commission's proposal for merger did not consider public Protestantism as a vital part of the Board's identity or mission, nor did it mention the Methodist Building, its Capitol Hill property. The Commission determined that the Board's Washington location was not integral to the Board's identity. The Commission suggested that its Capitol Hill property was only incidental. By overlooking the geographical location of the Board, the Commission also elided the Board's Methodist Building and previous history as representing the MEC's political ambitions on the national stage. This portrayal of the Board made it a natural partner for the Education Board in the Commission's plan, but this geographical omission also left the perfect argumentative opening for Wilson and the Board to oppose the plan, too.

A National Headquarters: Wilson's Response

Because the proposal to merge the Boards of Temperance and Education developed concurrently with the movement for Methodist reunion, Wilson exploited the moment when many Methodists contemplated the future of their church to argue for the importance of temperance, public Protestantism, and the Methodist Building in twentieth-century American Methodism. "A proposed merging is a movement in the wrong direction," Wilson wrote to Reverend Oscar Olson, a member of the Supervisional Commission, in a March 1935 letter, explaining that merger would have harmful consequences for the wider Protestant prohibition

movement and for American Methodism. The Commission solicited Wilson's views on the topic because of his perspective as General Secretary of a Board, and he used the opportunity to defend its independence. In the letter, Wilson argued a merger would be disadvantageous to an expanding scope of Methodism, mainline Protestantism, and social Christianity. First, Wilson explained to Olson that "the Methodists from John Wesley's hour to this have been a fighting church," he said, citing the founder of Methodism, and his opposition to both slavery and alcohol consumption. To merge the Temperance Board with another would be tantamount to "a hauling down of its flag," betraying the theological convictions of the Methodist movement's founder. Then, Wilson cited two examples of mainline Protestant denominations that had shut down or merged their temperance boards, the MECS and the Presbyterians, respectively, resulting in diminished Protestant advocacy on temperance. Merger would be moving in the wrong direction, Wilson suggested, proposing instead to strengthen denominational temperance boards and coordinate among them for concerted action.³¹

Writing at the same time reunion talks were in progress, Wilson suggested that a proposal to merge the Temperance Board would divide the church over public Protestantism, one that embraced social reform as means to improve the world, and another that opposed such an activist church. Throughout this argument, Wilson capitalized the word "Church," prompting the reader to question whether he was referring to the MEC, the various Methodist denominations, or the Church universal. As Wilson was writing during the fundamentalist-modernist controversies, it is possible he did not want the MEC to become paralyzed by the same debates that so deeply divided Baptists and Presbyterians; temperance advocacy was his solution to avoid the

³¹ Clarence True Wilson to Oscar Olson, letter, March 11, 1935, Correspondence, 1935-1939, Wilson Collection, Methodist Collection - Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

fundamentalist-modernist divide in American Protestantism. Much like Wilson had portrayed Bishop Simpson as the personification of public Protestantism at the chapel dedication in 1929, he now cited three historical figures in Methodism as examples of why the future church should continue to practice a theology of social reform, including support of temperance. “The Church of John Wesley, of Bishop Simpson, and of Frances E. Willard belongs in the front of the fighting forces, not in the rear. If our Church follows the precedent of its founder or the need of its times, it will be in the vanguard,” he wrote. Reunion was never mentioned in Wilson’s letter, but it likely animated his argument. Writing while reunion negotiations were pending, Wilson championed a future of Methodism that embraced the Methodist legacy of social reform through temperance.³²

In his letter to Olson, Wilson also raised the Methodist Building as a barrier to a board merger, mobilizing the history of fundraising for the building in service of his concern for the future of the Methodism. Wilson argued that any merger of the Board of Temperance with another board would dishonor and disrespect the wishes of donors of the Methodist Building. “Every dollar of it was given by people distinctly for the cause of temperance, prohibition and public morals for the purpose of keeping that subject in prominence, even at the fore of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” he argued, emphasizing the building donors’ support of using the building to advance public Protestantism. Just as he cited Wesley, Simpson, and Willard, Wilson now mobilized the building donors as key figures in shaping the future of the Board and Methodism. “These people would regard a merging of this Board with any other Board as a diversion of their gift and a placing of their cause in a secondary position,” he said. Wilson contended that donors specifically funded the Methodist Building because its Capitol Hill

³² Ibid.

location would help to promote temperance, prohibition, and “public morals.” McDowell had described the work of the Board as primarily educational in response to the *Christian Century* editorial that opposed the Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, but now Wilson argued that the Board’s Capitol Hill property and political goals merited the Board’s continued independence. To do otherwise, Wilson suggested, would thwart the will of the donors and even open up legal questions. Though Wilson speculated about the legality of using the Methodist Building for purposes unrelated to temperance, he did not cite specifically what would make this a legally dubious action. However, unknown to him, Wilson also presaged a controversy that would develop seventy years later.³³

In the fall of 1935, when the plans for reunion and merger each took their final shape, Wilson framed his argument opposing board merger in the context of Methodist reunion. “This is the most inopportune suggestion at this time that could be made. Three denominations are about to unite,” Wilson wrote in a front-page November 1935 *Voice* article entitled, “The Proposed Merger of the Boards.” Though the Supervision Commission did not situate the Board reorganization in the context of reunion, nor did the Reunification Commission pay much attention to Boards, Wilson chose to connect the two developments. Wilson contextualized the proposal to merge the Temperance Board with the Education Board in the wider reunion effort—even though the two were largely independent of each other—arguing it was important to keep the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals independent.³⁴ Wilson’s move was not only strategic, it also had some precedent: the 1916 General Conference sent the Board to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Clarence True Wilson, “The Proposed Merger of Boards,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, November 1935; Wilson, “The Proposed Merger of Boards,” undated, Board of Temperance: N, Wilson Collection.

Washington at the same time it also authorized unification talks with the MECS. As chapter one discussed, both actions expressed the national ambitions for white American Methodism, an ambition that Wilson deployed again almost twenty years later.³⁵

Wilson utilized Methodist reunion to once again frame the discussion as about the future of American Methodism. He argued that the proposal to merge the Temperance Board with the Education Board was not only ill-timed, but would also leave the new Methodist church without a temperance agency. “Because of unification, it is a good time to keep in tact the efficient organization of the Church so as to make it a working basis in the new merger,” he wrote. In addition to the reasons he had enumerated to Olson in his March 1935 letter, a merger would look like a retreat from what Wilson understood as Methodism’s historic commitment to temperance. As the three majority-white branches of Methodism planned to unite to form a national church, Wilson saw this as a moment to embrace temperance even more strongly, not back away from it. He saw its preservation as defining the identity of the soon-to-be Methodist Church. Maintaining a temperance board into the new church would honor Wesley’s commitment to temperance. Drawing on what he had written to Olson in March, Wilson also wrote that a merger would therefore hurt other mainline Protestant denominations that looked to the MEC Temperance Board for leadership, while liquor suppliers and dealers would embrace the news as yet another victory, after having just repealed Prohibition.³⁶

To Wilson, nothing better symbolized Methodism continuing its historic commitment to temperance and moral reform in the newly reunified Methodist Church than the Methodist Building, a building constructed in honor of the ideals of public Protestantism. The Supervision

³⁵ H.R. Wedderspoon, “Reports of the Committee on Temperance,” *Daily Christian Advocate* XVIII, no. 24 (May 27, 1916): 460–61; Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 360–361.

³⁶ Wilson, “Proposed Merger of the Boards,” *Voice*, November 1935.

Commission did not specify where the new, merged board should be located, and the Reunion Commission did not call for a national headquarters, but Wilson proposed the Methodist Building as the center of the new national church. He used the Methodist Building to argue against merger by appealing to a sense of national Methodism:

Twenty-five years ago this Board was the poorest Board in the Church. Today it is the only one that owns its own headquarters and has built so adequately that the United Church, when the three Methodist Branches have consolidated, will find its natural home in the Nation's Capital and adequate headquarters in The Methodist Building. The withdrawal from Washington would eliminate this possible headquarters of United Methodism, divert from the purposes for which it was given a million dollars of self-sacrificing gifts already made and cause a jubilee among the wet forces of this republic.³⁷

As the three white Methodist denominations approached reunion, Wilson appealed to the readers' imaginations to envision the Methodist Building as the inevitable home for the new Methodist Church. As the national capital city that neither identified fully with the north or the south, Washington, D.C. held appeal for white Methodists as an idealized city free of the limitations of sectionalism and regionalism that had long vexed Methodism. The new Methodist Church, centered in Washington, D.C. could finally realize the hope of becoming a truly national church and Methodists could wield greater influence in shaping public life.

Ironically, Wilson's stated vision of the Methodist Building as site of the national Methodist Church headquarters said little about temperance, prohibition, or even public morals. Yet Wilson circumvented his elision of temperance in this discussion by assuring the reader that only the Temperance Board could raise the funds for the building. If the Temperance Board were to merge with Education, the new board would have to assume the debts of the Methodist Building, Wilson wrote, but he contended that only the cause of temperance would inspire people to give. "People are willing to give to temperance reform who will not give to it under

³⁷ Ibid.

any other group or name,” Wilson said, noting that the Temperance Board had worked to raise funds to pay the building’s debts, even during the Depression. “It would be difficult to raise money for the debt on the Methodist Building if the work were merged [with the Education Board],” wrote Wilson, adding that the Education Board had its own challenges with fundraising for education.³⁸

The *Voice* visually illustrates how Wilson used the Methodist Building as a wedge in his argument to preserve the Board’s independence. The article on the building debt spatially interrupts his article opposing Board merger. In the November 1935 *Voice*, Wilson’s manifesto “The Proposed Merger of the Boards” occupies the front and last page of the four-page monthly newsletter, while his essay solicitation of donations to pay down Methodist Building’s mortgage debt is on page two. While the amount of text and columns for this essay exceeded the amount that could fit on any single page of the newsletter, the placement of the second half of the article on the fourth, and not second page, almost ensures the reader would flip through and at least glimpse the headline “The Methodist Building” and image of the structure before finishing Wilson’s article. When reading about the Wilson’s vision of the Methodist Building as the future home for the national Methodist Church, a reader only had to flip the page back to see an image of the proposed national headquarters.³⁹

United Through Debt

Having just inserted the Methodist Building into the debate about Board merger by declaring the building as the presumptive site of the new national Methodist Church, Wilson proceeded to use the issue of paying the building’s mortgage debt as a method of uniting MEC

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Wilson, “Proposed Merger of the Boards,” and “The Methodist Building,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, November 1935.

members in support of the Board. The article on the Methodist Building that interrupted “The Proposed Merger of the Boards” pleaded that its readers would consider donating to pay down its mortgage. The Board’s debt on the property skyrocketed after having taken out an additional mortgage to finance the construction of the apartments at 110 Maryland Avenue. During the Great Depression, the Board faced dire financial difficulties, and even after salary reductions for the staff, the Board struggled to pay the mortgage on the Methodist Building and faced the prospect of foreclosure. By the summer of 1935, when the Supervision Commission was readying its plan for merger, the Board owed nearly \$100,000 on the mortgage. The growing indebtedness threatened foreclosure, as well as the Board’s overall credit and sustainability. “Foreclosure of those mortgages would be a severe blow to the prestige of the Methodist Church,” wrote Board secretary Harry Burgan, suggesting the reputation of American Methodism was at stake.⁴⁰

By the summer of 1935, the mortgage debt only grew, sparking the concern of other arms of the MEC bureaucracy. The World Service Commission, the body in the MEC that apportioned funds for church agencies, expressed concern over the indebtedness and arranged a payment plan between the Board and the World Service Commission in order to service the balance of the mortgage. The World Service Commission agreed to provide \$37,500 in three equal payments of \$12,500 for the sole purpose of reducing the building mortgage, attaching progressively more stringent criteria for receiving each installment. The first installment required agreeing to the terms of the plan, which included a commitment from the Board to devote 25 percent of all its incoming collections to paying down the mortgage; the second obligated the Board to liquidate

⁴⁰ Special meeting minutes, April 17, 1934, Minutes, 1934-1939; Exhibit A, Statement of Financial Condition as at October 31, 1935, General and Building Funds, 1935, GBCS Administrative Records, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

its rental account, which entailed collecting over \$5,000 on past due rents; and the third and final apportionment required the Board to raise \$25,000 exclusively for paying the mortgage.⁴¹ The final payment, which the World Service Commission required the Board complete by May 25, 1936, loomed when Wilson published his solicitation in the November 1935 issue of the *Voice*.

In order to motivate them to donate, Wilson helped readers imagine the influence the Methodist Building could have in the future Methodist Church. He retold the history of the Methodist Building in service of his imagined future for the newly reunified church. Beginning with the Board's arrival in the city in 1916, describing the fundraising efforts for the Methodist Building in the early 1920s, and its construction in 1923, Wilson's intention was to inspire readers to see how important and significant the Board's Methodist Building had been to promoting public Protestantism in Washington over the past twenty years. "After we had paid the last dollar on our six hundred-thousand-dollar building, we...put up an annex twice as big as the original," Wilson recounted, conveniently neglecting how the construction of the apartment annex had been plagued with delays and the fate of the entire Methodist Building was in peril during a Congressional lobby investigation. Having recounted a triumphal past, Wilson explained the present mortgage crisis that impeded the building's illustrious future in the new church. "We still owe five hundred thousand on this building," he wrote about the apartment annex at 110 Maryland Avenue. "The present income from our building pays all the interest, taxes, upkeep and insurance, but it has not, at depression prices, met the curtail on the debt," he

⁴¹ Executive committee minutes, July 1, 1935, Minutes, 1934-1939, GBCS Administrative Records.

explained. Wilson wrote that the Board needed to raise \$100,000 before General Conference in May 1936, the same meeting which would address proposals of reunion and board mergers.⁴²

By discussing the future of the Methodist Building in the context of a future national church, Wilson connected the fate of the Methodist Building with the future of the reunion effort. His argument implied that each needed the other to succeed. The goal exercising more influence in American life inspired Methodist reunion; therefore, Wilson rationalized that reunion needed a dedicated building to promote public Protestantism. And in so doing, Wilson transformed the outstanding debt of Methodist Building from Depression-era budgetary woes of one organization into an urgent matter upon which the future of Methodism's national ambitions rested. For this reason, paying off the debt on the Methodist Building would provide the new, national Methodist Church with a secure financial foundation. For the second time in the same issue of the *Voice*, Wilson inserted the Methodist Building into the impending Methodist reunion effort.⁴³ He predicted, "The United Church will not go to Richmond or to New York for National Headquarters. It will come to the Nation's Capital and find in the Methodist Building in Washington its natural home." With this expansive scope for the Methodist Building in the new national church, Wilson urged readers to give generously. He hoped to pay off the mortgage quickly and use the income the building generated to establish an endowment for the new church's work in temperance and public morals. He wrote:

⁴² May 1936 was the same deadline when the Board needed to meet the fundraising quota by the World Service Commission. "Report of the Special Committee appointed consider the recommendations of the Administrative Committee of the World Service Commission," July 1, 1935, Minutes, 1934-1939, GBCS Administrative Records; Wilson, "The Methodist Building," *The Voice*, November 1935.

⁴³ The Methodist Protestant Church (MPC), was a third, much smaller branch of white Methodism. It formed after a split with the MEC in 1828 over opposition to an episcopal form of church government. The MPC participated in the 1939 reunion with the MEC and MECS to form the Methodist Church. Davis, *The Methodist Unification*, 38-39.

Do you know of any place in the Kingdom of heaven on earth, where you could put a thousand, or a hundred or even a dollar, where it would do more good and multiply its influence thru all the years better than liquidating the debt and releasing the entire income of the building as an endowment to the Temperance cause and to the entire moral program of the Methodist Church for this time to come?⁴⁴

In this long rhetorical question, the key to Wilson's solicitation is the phrase "for this time to come." The key to his fundraising appeal was to look towards the future.

Board meeting minutes suggest that its managers also understood the mortgage payment and merger proposal as interrelated. The minutes of a joint meeting of the Board's executive and finance committees on November 5, 1935 are illustrative, and suggest that the managers who governed the Board endorsed Wilson's strategy. At that meeting, which occurred just after the Commission had released its recommendation to merge the Education and Temperance Boards of the MEC, the mortgage debt payment plan dominated discussion. "The committee felt that the obligation to meet the conditions of the World Service preferential of \$25,000 [to be raised by the Board in order to receive the third bailout installment] should have primary consideration," wrote the Board secretary, Harry W. Burgan. The committee members deliberated about how the Board could generate the requisite cash by the May deadline, when the minutes shift abruptly to mention the Commission on Supervision's recent report. Board President Bishop Hughes named three members to craft a statement about the proposed merger.⁴⁵ Then, in the following paragraph, the minutes show that discussion shifted back to the building: Wilson suggested that new pledge cards be created to solicit funds for the building debt through the following April. On a first pass, the minutes suggest the merger proposal was an afterthought or a *non sequitor*, but when read in the context of Wilson's two articles and the Board's subsequent public statements

⁴⁴ Wilson, "The Methodist Building," *The Voice*, November 1935.

⁴⁵ Hughes, like McDowell, was Bishop of Washington when President of the Board.

about the merger, the private minutes of the executive and finance committees suggest that the Board's leadership connected the Methodist Building's debt to their arguments against merger.⁴⁶

The Board's public records confirm this. The statement endorsed by the Board's managers and penned by its recording secretary, Burgan, cites the Board's property as the first reason they oppose merging the Board with Education. "It would open legal difficulties as to the use of properties and funds given for our specific purposes," the Board's statement said, echoing Wilson's claims that using the donations for purposes other than temperance and public morals would be legally questionable. The Board's resolution further added that merger "would make for serious disappointment, and even disaffection, among the good people who have been our generous benefactors."⁴⁷ The Board, its managers said, now generated income based on its reputation and relationship, writing that it would be unfortunate to jeopardize that revenue source and risk disrespecting previous donors. (The statement also reiterated Wilson's other arguments against merger, such as how merger would foster the misperception that the MEC had retreated from its commitment to temperance reform after Prohibition's repeal, and that merger would subordinate temperance to education.)⁴⁸ Whether Wilson's hand influenced the crafting of the Board's statement is unclear, but the statement does indicate evidence of a shared strategy between the General Secretary and Board's managers about using the Methodist Building as a wedge against the merger proposal. Wilson wanted to leverage the Methodist Building's mortgage debt to help the Methodist reunion effort in hopes of supporting a strong, national

⁴⁶ Executive and finance committee minutes, November 5, 1935, Minutes, 1934-1939, GBCS Administrative Records.

⁴⁷ Edwin Holt Hughes, "Looking Toward General Conference: Against Any Merger," *Christian Advocate*, January 16, 1936, 58; Edwin Holt Hughes, "The Board of Temperance Replies to Commission's Proposed Merger," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, January 1936.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

church. Incidentally, his vision of a Washington headquarters for the new church in the Methodist Building also left the Board intact, a fact his critics did not overlook.

Responses to the Board Plan: Different Visions of the Future of Methodism

The Supervision Commission's chairperson, Reverend Louis C. Wright, also claimed his board merger plan would be the best for the future of the new church. Like Wilson, Wright linked his Commission's structural reform proposals to the ongoing reunion effort. Noting the concurrent development of the reunion commission with the supervision commission, he also connected the two in a broader effort to reform and improve Methodism for the twentieth century. "All Methodists will be interested in these suggestions growing out of proposals for change and union," he wrote.⁴⁹ However, while Wright also understood the current moment to be pivotal in American Methodism, he interpreted Wilson's efforts to center Methodist reunion on the Methodist Building and public Protestantism as attempts to foil the Commission's proposals. To Wright, Wilson's plans would only mire the future national church in bureaucracy.

While Wright and Wilson both championed reunion, each argued for different means to the same end. Wilson believed reunion would be realized *through* church bureaucracy and embodied in the physical site of the Methodist Building in Washington, D.C., but Wright argued that reunion presented an opportunity to prune and streamline what he saw as excessive church bureaucracy. Methodist studies scholar Frederick Norwood explained that in the early twentieth century, the major resistance to denomination-wide Boards and other societies within the MEC was on the grounds of growing church bureaucracy, not mission.⁵⁰ Wright evidently embraced this outlook: newspaper reports of the 1936 General Conference note that Wright opposed a plan

⁴⁹ Louis C. Wright, "The Supervisional System and Union," *Christian Advocate*, February 20, 1936, 174–175.

⁵⁰ Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 349.

to give General Secretaries of Boards voice but no vote at General Conference, agencies which he called “lobbies.”⁵¹

As Wilson’s career in prohibition advocacy across the nation and in Washington shaped his embrace of public Protestantism, the trajectory of Wright’s career also informed why he had little interest in it. Wright had spent the majority of his career in the more traditional role as pastor of a ME church in Cleveland; only in 1934, around the same time he chaired the Supervision Committee, Wright became president of the nearby Baldwin-Wallace College. Because of the institutions and geographic locations of his career, Wright did not embrace public Protestantism to the same degree that Wilson did.⁵² In his *Advocate* article defending the Commission’s plan, Wright deployed the moment of Methodist reunion as an argument for working for greater effectiveness of the Boards, as well, contrasting his restructuring plan with personal or territorial fiefdoms resistant to change. “We shall need to be careful not to be stampeded by matters of tradition, endowments, personal interests, past records, and various types of propaganda,” wrote Wright. Though he never mentioned Wilson’s name in this article, this statement—especially the line about endowments—alluded to Wilson’s arguments about the history of donations toward the Methodist Building, arguments Wright would likely have been aware of since the letter to Olson the previous March. Wright rejected Wilson’s plan to create an endowment for the Methodist Building as the new church’s national headquarters. Reunion

⁵¹ “Methodists in Session: Boards Denied Voice,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1936; “Methodists Assail Move to Give Floor to ‘Lobbies’: Dispute on Rules Marks Opening of Quadrennial Session,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 2, 1936; “Methodists Open Conclave in Ohio,” *Baltimore Sun*, May 2, 1936.

⁵² “Dr. Louis C. Wright,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 14, 1953.

would not come through building institutional endowments, but through efficiently streamlining the structure of the church.⁵³

Laird Mills, the editor of the Pacific edition of the *Christian Advocate* extended Wright's skepticism, arguing that the future of Methodist temperance advocacy needed to focus on education. He argued that Methodist support of temperance would not be diminished or legally in jeopardy if the Temperance Board moved under the umbrella of the Education Board, dismissing Wilson's reason for independence. "The objection that the proposed move will involve a perversion of funds is not well founded," he added, dismissing Wilson's appeals to establish a building endowment fund. "The income from the building at Washington, if and when it is not needed for debt principle, can be applied to actual temperance propaganda under the auspices of the Board of Education as well as under the auspices of a separate board." Mills saw Wilson's debt plan as thinly veiled subterfuge for preserving the independence of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals, which was unnecessary in his estimation. The future of Methodist temperance advocacy laid in education, not endowments.⁵⁴

Mills proceeded to disabuse readers of Wilson's claim that Washington, D.C. and the Methodist Building should be the center of the national church. Mills argued that a national church transcended any specific city's identity. In order for Wilson to insert the Methodist Building as a wedge in the merger debate, both its debt and its location mattered. Mills challenged Wilson on the Washington location on two grounds: first that it was inconsequential, and second, that it was highly unrepresentative of the national MEC. "The fact that its [the Education Board] headquarters are in Chicago instead of Washington will not make any

⁵³ Wright, "The Supervisional System and Union," *Christian Advocate*, 174–175.

⁵⁴ Edward Laird Mills, "The Future of the Board of Temperance," *Christian Advocate*, February 27, 1936, 196.

difference,” wrote Mills, contending the Boards’ locations were insignificant, having no bearing on the identity of the organizations.⁵⁵ Mills’s argument follows the logic Bishop McDowell articulated in his response to the *Christian Century* editorial that called for the Board to move off Capitol Hill, as chapter three demonstrated. When faced with allegations of being a lobby and improperly mixing religion and politics, McDowell responded in an editorial, “There is nothing that we are doing that we cannot do twenty blocks away, nothing that we could not do twenty miles away.”⁵⁶ Perhaps Mills had McDowell’s editorial, written five years earlier, in mind when he composed his argument that the location did not matter.

Mills’ second charge, that the Washington, D.C. location was unrepresentative, entailed claiming that Washington had a regional or local identity, not a national one. Again, Mills concurred with Wilson on the broad principle of a national Methodist church; he differed in emphasis of location. Wilson had framed his opposition to the merger plan on the grounds that the Methodist Building ought to become the new home of the national church, claiming that no city was more appropriate for such a site than the nation’s capital and no board more representatives of Methodist history and theology. Such a claim also built upon the public Protestantism that the Board had asserted since its move to Washington in 1916. Furthermore, Wilson’s pitch for paying down the Methodist Building’s mortgage relied upon fostering investment among Methodists across the U.S. in this specific Washington site.⁵⁷ Mills dismissed Wilson’s claims that the Board was national and instead dismissed the location as regional. “The

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ William Fraser McDowell, “A Plain Statement by Bishop McDowell: The President of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals Answers the *Christian Century*,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, January 1931.

⁵⁷ Wilson, “Proposed Merger of the Boards,” and “The Methodist Building,” *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, November 1935.

Board of Temperance is quite unrepresentative,” Mills wrote. “It is essentially made up of individuals chosen chiefly from Washington,” he observed.⁵⁸ In fact, Mills’ claim was no exaggeration: every *Book of Discipline* since the Board’s creation in 1916 mandated that two-thirds of the members of the managers “shall reside in, near or of convenient access to Washington, D.C.”⁵⁹ Mills argued this regional bias in the membership of the managers contradicted Wilson’s boasts of national representation. He concluded that merger with Education would be beneficial, because the Education Board was truly national in representation, not just in name only.⁶⁰

As this discussion has illustrated, bureaucrats, editors, and bishops dominated the conversation about the Commissions’ proposals, but grassroots members of the MEC weighed in various ways. First, evidence suggests that members of the MEC found the Supervision Commission’s proposal confusing and poorly timed. One MEC member from Connecticut, J. I. Bartholomew, expressed that he found the Commission’s timing awkward because of the ongoing reunion talks with the MECS and MPC, though he concurred with the proposed reforms.

⁵⁸ Mills, “The Future of the Board of Temperance,” *Christian Advocate*, February 27, 1936.

⁵⁹ David G. Downey, ed., *Doctrines and Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1916* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1916), § 492, Article III. This geographic residency requirement was present in every *Discipline* through the 1932 edition.

⁶⁰ Mills even equated the fact that the Temperance Board received funds from all across the MEC, but members from the Washington, D.C. area were over-represented on the Board to “taxation without representation.” This adage was first coined during the American Revolution when the American colonists opposed taxes imposed by the English Parliament when they had no representation in that body. This comparison implied that Wilson’s Board and his leadership were fundamentally un-American and un-patriotic; the exact opposite of the case that Wilson was making when he lobbied for the new national church’s headquarters to be in the Methodist Building. Ironically, in the late twentieth-century advocates of voting rights for the District of Columbia embraced the phrase “taxation without representation.” Even D.C. license plates are adorned with the phrase, commenting on how the jurisdiction pays federal taxes but does not have a voting Representative in Congress. Mills, “The Future of the Board of Temperance,” *Christian Advocate*, February 27, 1936; Daniel A. Smith, *Tax Crusaders: The Politics of Direct Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 21–23.

“It would seem wise that the proposition to modify our own branch of Methodism should be kept in the background until the question of Unification is settled,” he wrote to the editor of the *Christian Advocate*. The Supervision Commission’s proposals should only be evaluated after a vote on reunion, Bartholomew rationalized, but if reunion passed, then the Commission’s reforms would not be very useful because the reforms only applied to the MEC, which would soon be superseded by the new national denomination.⁶¹

Despite the range of perspectives presented about the future of the church and the Board, the Board’s financial audits from the period show that MEC members increased giving to the Board during this period, an indication of likely endorsing Wilson’s vision for the Methodist Building as the national headquarters. When Wilson pitched his vision for the Methodist Building and articulated a strong defense of a robust temperance organization in American Methodism, records show donations increased. While the financial audit from fiscal year 1931 (ending October 31 of that year) shows incoming pledges to the Building Fund had dropped down to \$32,750 during the Depression, in 1935 and 1936 the audits show a sharp increase in giving.⁶² By the end of fiscal year 1935, pledges received totaled nearly \$52,000 and in 1936, the donations to the Building Fund totaled to \$164,364.40. In an article in the May 1936 *Voice*, published just days before the start of the General Conference, the writer (likely Pickett) commented that the pledges far exceeded the \$25,000 that the World Service challenged the Board to fundraise in order to meet the terms of the bailout. The records of the 1936 Building Fund show donations from Methodists across the U.S., including nearby mid-Atlantic states such

⁶¹ J. I. Bartholomew, “Letters to the Editor: Two at One Time,” *Christian Advocate*, January 2, 1936, 21.

⁶² 1931, 1935, 1936, Building Fund, 1929-1936, Records of the General Welfare Division of the General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

as Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New York; Midwestern states including Indiana, Michigan and Ohio, and Western states such as California, Washington, and Colorado.⁶³ These documents reveal that Wilson's vision for the Temperance Board and its Methodist Building not only captivated members of the MEC across the U.S., but was compelling enough to exceed fundraising goals. While some MEC members may have found the Commission's restructuring plan confusing or oddly timed, members clearly expressed support of a strong temperance organization and a Washington, D.C. headquarters.

As the General Conference meeting approached, Board leaders continued to write editorials in arguing favor of the Board's independence in the future church.⁶⁴ However, the Board's final and perhaps most compelling argument for its independence was the creation of a building endowment. The establishment of the Methodist Building endowment did not come from the donations across the MEC, but from two individuals: Bishop Matthew Simpson's two daughters, Sarah and Ida Simpson. That February, the last of Simpson's daughters, Sarah Elizabeth Simpson, died and in her will, bequeathed to the Board an additional \$50,000 for its Methodist Building. Along with her sister, Ida, who had also bequeathed the same amount to the Board upon her death a few years earlier, the two Simpson sisters had donated the funds to construct Simpson Memorial Chapel in 1929. The bequests from the Simpson estate established an endowment for the Methodist Building, helping to release the building from debt and further its educational work. Wilson, upon learning of the bequests, wrote to the Simpson sisters'

⁶³ States from the former confederacy are notably absent from this list, as that was the region of the country the MECS was established. Ibid., 4-15; "Thank You!" *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, May 1936.

⁶⁴ Deets Pickett, "A Personal Postscript – D.P.," *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, March 1936; "Why a Board of Temperance?" *The Voice of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, April 1936.

lawyer, Nelson West, in April 1936 for permission to use the sisters' gifts to pay down the building debt. "The chief interest of Miss Ida Simpson and of her sister Miss S. Elizabeth Simpson...was in the Methodist Building and the educational work which its operation sustains," he replied to Wilson's query. "I feel very definitely that the best use to which the funds coming from these two estates can be put would be the reduction of the mortgage debt upon the Methodist Building." West advised Wilson this would be not only an appropriate use of the funds, but one consistent with the Simpson sisters' wishes.⁶⁵

When the *Voice* recounted news of the endowment, the article's author connected the legacy of Bishop Simpson, through his daughters' bequests, to the future of American Methodism. By connecting the Methodist Building to the Simpsons, the Board implied that it and its building were their successors to the Simpsons' vision of public Protestantism. As General Secretary, Wilson consistently had narrated the history of Methodism in order to articulate his vision of public Protestantism. In Wilson's first letter to the Commission he invoked Simpson, along with Wesley and Willard in his support of an independent temperance board when he wrote, "The Church of John Wesley, of Bishop Simpson, and of Frances E. Willard belongs in the front of the fighting forces, not in the rear."⁶⁶ Now, with the monetary gifts of Simpson's descendants, Wilson was able to ensure the stability of the Methodist Building for the future church. "A forward looking General Conference will not lessen the significance of Protestantism or of any of its effective agencies in the Capital of the great republic," the author of the *Voice*

⁶⁵ Nelson West to Clarence True Wilson, letter, April 13, 1936, General Board of Church and Society legal documents, volume 3, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

⁶⁶ Wilson to Olson, letter, March 11, 1935, Correspondence, 1935-1939, Wilson Collection.

article concluded, as if daring the General Conference that would soon vote on a reunion proposal to flout the wishes and actions of MEC members and the Simpson daughters.⁶⁷

General Conference: The Methodist Building and Public Protestantism in the New Church

As expected, questions about the future of the church, and what a national Methodist church would look like, dominated the 1936 MEC General Conference. At the meeting, the Supervision Commission's plan for the board merger dovetailed with the Reunion Commission's much broader Plan of Union with the MECS and MPC, making the two discrete plans inherently related. The Plan of Union, which said little about Boards and nothing about the Methodist Building, carried important implications for the Supervision Commission's proposal to merge the Board of Temperance with Education. First, and most obviously, the Plan of Union overshadowed the Commissions' merger plan—reuniting a nearly century-long schism was more attention worthy than a proposal to reorganize the denomination's bureaucracy. In addition, the Plan of Union also the scuttled any attempt to substantively discuss Wright's Commission proposals. Upon presenting the Supervision's plan to the General Conference, Wright immediately requested that the body defer voting on the plan until after voting on reunion. After the Plan of Union passed, the Supervision Commission's proposals never came up again.⁶⁸ Whether or not the Supervision Commission's merger plan was a serious threat is unclear; what is indubitable is that Methodists used the conversation about merger and the new national church to articulate their own understandings of the role Protestantism should play in public life.

The merger proposal elicited strong reactions from MEC members about what should be the future of the Board, and when the proposals are evaluated together, they indicate a lively

⁶⁷ "Thank You!" *The Voice*, May 1936.

⁶⁸ *Journal of the General Conference* (1936): 757-58; *Daily Christian Advocate* XXIII, no. 4 (May 5, 1936): 81.

debate over Methodist understandings of public Protestantism and what the Methodist Building ought to represent. Some Methodists wanted to use the end of Prohibition as an opportunity to expand the Board's mission to promote public Protestantism with an even larger portfolio. The Asheville, North Carolina district of the MEC's Blue Ridge Atlantic Conference, for example, proposed renaming the Board as the "Board of Christian Citizenship," a name that invoked the language that Wilson himself used to describe his own understanding of public Protestantism.⁶⁹ Under this new name, the Board would address topics such as "Peace, Temperance, Political Integrity, Economic Justice, Racial Relations, Personal Purity, and Gambling." Endorsing this expansion of the Board's work would have embraced an active role for Protestant voices in public life and politics, following in the same trajectory with the 1916 General Conference's actions to expand the Board to include "public morals," but the committee overwhelmingly rejected the proposal.⁷⁰

On the other extreme, other Methodists suggested removing the third title, "Public Morals" from the Board's name, an action that carried the implication of retreating from its involvement in public life in order to focus more on temperance. The person who offered this suggestion clearly understood the implications of this act, as he said that the title of Public Morals "has given an entirely wrong impression to the general public and has made Methodism assume the character of a meddlesome Matty in everybody's public business." The delegate offering the suggestion, Joseph Gray, suggested a more restrained name, mindful of how the Board's public Protestantism had opened the church to criticisms from the *Christian Century* and

⁶⁹ Wilson first used the term "Christian Citizenship" in his 1913 book, *Dry or Die*. Clarence True Wilson, *Dry or Die: The Anglo-Saxon Dilemma* (Topeka, Kan.: Temperance Society, 1913).

⁷⁰ Blue Ridge Atlantic Conference, Larry H. Thompson, "Resolution on the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals," Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, 1936, General Conference Records.

Congress. Gray added that Public Morals “has laid Methodism open to repeated indictments falsely based upon the charge of being a lobbying institution because that particular phrase ‘and Public Morals’ gives the impression that we are interfering in all the varied and different judgments of men and women as to what constitutes public morality.”⁷¹ If the Asheville District’s proposed Board of Christian Citizenship expressed an even more robust sense of public Protestantism, Gray’s proposal represented a reversal from the addition of “Public Morals” twenty years earlier.⁷² And, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, the title of “Public Morals” helped motivate the Board to construct the Methodist Building as a representation of its public Protestantism.

Neither proposal was adopted, as another delegate warned that redefining the title or adding explanatory clauses could mean that the Board would face scrutiny from the Internal Revenue Service as a political organization.⁷³ The caution about governmental oversight in this decision demonstrated the exact opposite of the assertive, interventionist role that a commitment to public Protestantism prescribes. Instead of asserting a right to govern based on a Protestant identity, the future role the MEC prescribed for the Board was conservative in scope, in that it did not endorse or embrace an expanded role for either the Board or the Methodist Building. Reflecting the majority of resolutions that Methodists had submitted about the Board, the MEC General Conference adopted a resolution that kept the Board as an independent temperance organization.⁷⁴ The resolution called to preserve the Board in its current form and “to preserve

⁷¹ “J.M.M. Gray’s Amendment,” *Daily Christian Advocate*, XXIII, no. 12 (May, 13, 1936): 279.

⁷² Wedderspoon, “Reports of the Committee on Temperance,” *Daily Christian Advocate* (May 27, 1916): 460.

⁷³ *Daily Christian Advocate*, XXIII, no. 12, (May, 13, 1936): 280.

⁷⁴ New York Conference, “A Protest against the proposed merger of the Board of Temperance with the Board of Education”; Iowa Conference, “To the Committee on Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals;” Rock River, Illinois Conference, “Resolution on the Board of

the identity of the Methodist Building at Washington, D.C. exclusively for the work of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, for whose purpose all the money raised has been paid and accepted in good faith.” This resolution, which came from the Oregon Conference, the same conference of which Wilson was a member, reflected Wilson’s handiwork, though it was not written by him directly. The argument for preservation is consistent with Wilson’s arguments to Olson and elsewhere for retaining the Board’s independence.⁷⁵

The General Conference’s focus on retention and preservation rather than expanding the Board or the building’s role suggests to some degree a withdrawal from public Protestantism, a fact that was only reinforced by the segregated, racialized terms of reunion. The racial segregation in the Plan of Union—which was the only part of the reunion proposal debated at General Conference—meant that there would be no centralized, national platform for the new Methodist Church to perform a public Protestant identity. As a result of the Plan of Union, which went into effect in 1939, the new Methodist Church remained loosely connected with regional centers of influence, having sewn together five white geographic regions into a loose national confederation of white Methodists, but lacked much central organization. Methodist studies scholar Russell Richey has argued that the reunion plan further regionalized white Methodists while ostensibly creating a national denomination.⁷⁶ Both the statements of Bishop Hughes who helped negotiate reunion with the MECS, and of black MEC members who denounced it show,

Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals,” Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, 1936, General Conference Records.

⁷⁵ Harry E. Woolever, “Continuance of Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals,” *Daily Christian Advocate* XXIII, no. 8 (May 9, 1936): 196; Fred C. Taylor, Oregon Conference, “Preservation Methodist Building,” Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, 1936, General Conference Records.

⁷⁶ Russell E. Richey, “Is Division a New Threat to the Denomination,” in *Questions for the Twenty-First Century Church*, ed. Russell E. Richey, William B. Lawrence, Dennis M. Campbell (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 115.

the creation of a national Methodist church occurred on the backs of black Methodists. As David Jones, a black Methodist from North Carolina phrased it, “Everyone knows the Plan is segregation, and segregation in the ugliest way, because it is couched in such pious terms.”⁷⁷ Just as historian Edward J. Blum has demonstrated in his work on white Protestantism after the Civil War, blackness was the foil upon which white Protestant nationalism reunited. The reunion of American Methodism recounted a particular example in the twentieth century of a familiar theme in American religious history.⁷⁸

Reunion under these terms ensured that the Board would remain independent, but the Plan of Union also undermined Wilson’s ambitions to describe the Methodist Building as the dedicated space for promoting public Protestantism. Under the regional jurisdiction structure, the Board in the new Methodist Church would become more nationally representative than it had been as the MEC Board, with board members now coming from each of the five white regional jurisdictions and the black jurisdiction, but the new Methodist Church would not become a centralized national denomination.⁷⁹ An unintended consequence of creating a denomination bound together by diffuse regional ties meant that new church had little need for a national office. The central paradox of the Plan of Union is that, when viewed through the context of the Methodist Building, the plan’s segregation and regional autonomy allowed the creation of a

⁷⁷ David D. Jones, *Daily Christian Advocate* XXIII, no. 4 (May 5, 1936): 87.

⁷⁸ Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

⁷⁹ Methodist Church (U.S.) et al., *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1939*: (The Methodist Episcopal Church; The Methodist Episcopal Church, South; The Methodist Protestant Church) (New York: Methodist Publishing House, 1939), §1193; “Certificate of Incorporation of the Board of Temperance of the Methodist Church,” October 25, 1949, Certificates of Incorporation - Division of General Welfare, 1917-1973, GBCS Administrative Records.

national Methodist church, but also prevented the Methodist Building from ever becoming the new church's home.

Therefore, white supremacy and Jim Crow segregation both facilitated Methodist reunion and, at the same time, limited what the Methodist Building represented to the new church. The building continued to symbolize the new Methodist Church's national ambitions in Washington, but the decentralized reunion plan did expand of the denomination's public Protestantism. It is unclear how convincing Wilson's proposal was to make the Methodist Building the denomination's national headquarters, because the proposed Plan of Union was well publicized and discussed in print and in public settings before the MEC General Conference in May 1936. While financial statements in 1935 show an outpouring of support to help pay down the Building's debt, the plan for the regional jurisdictions and the segregated Central Jurisdiction was well established at the same time. Wilson's personal motivations also remain unclear. It is not known whether he was arguing against the regional jurisdictions, saw them as a temporary, necessary evil to achieve reunion, or expressing a sincere desire for the Methodist Building as a national headquarters of the new denomination. Regardless of his intent, however, the peculiar way the Methodist Building featured in reunion exposed clear tensions with the Plan of Union. The aspiration of a national center representing a national Methodism and public Protestantism was consistent with Jim Crow segregation, yet collapsed under it, too.

In practice, the ties between whiteness and Methodist national reunion likely aligned with Wilson's own ideas of race. Wilson and other Board leaders—as well as Hughes and McDowell—had an equivocal, ambivalent record on racial equality in the MEC; they each privileged temperance and denominational reunion over civil rights, doing little to advance black civil rights in or outside the MEC. This was a recurring issue with the Board, and with Wilson.

African Americans—Methodists and observers in the press—criticized Wilson for focusing on the “public morals” of temperance and enforcing the Eighteenth Amendment, Prohibition, over the Fourteenth Amendment, equal protection for all citizens, and he and the Board built in a city divided on strong lines of race and religion.⁸⁰ Because several leaders of the Board also had representation on the reunion commission, we can appreciate how their racial attitudes influenced how they envisioned the future of the new national church. One Board manager, Harold P. Sloan, a MEC minister from New Jersey, helped craft the Board’s statement opposing merger. He not only requested to defer Wright’s proposals, but he also defended the segregated Central Jurisdiction in the Plan of Union. Sloan disavowed claims that the merger would create “a white man’s church,” and even disabused claims of the whiteness of Jesus. Instead, he preferred to describe the Central Jurisdiction as “not race discrimination but an effort to provide a race that is a minority group in Methodism with enlarged opportunity.”⁸¹ In addition to Sloan’s connection to the Board, both of the MEC Bishops who shepherded the reunion talks—first Bishop William Fraser McDowell and after his retirement, Bishop Edwin Holt Hughes—also served as presidents of the Board. Hughes, in his memoir reflecting on the reunion effort, wrote, “We had to guard ourselves against efforts at reform through the process of reunion. Our commission was not set to remake the Church, but reunite the Church.”⁸² Each collaborated with Wilson and the Board, and enjoyed office the space in the Methodist Building reserved for the

⁸⁰ “M.E. Body Favors No Punishment of the South,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 29, 1930; “M.E. Temperance Board Head Flayed for Dodging the Lynching Issue.”

⁸¹ “General Conference: Third Day,” *Christian Advocate*, May 14, 1936, 463; Harold P. Sloan, *Daily Christian Advocate* XXIII, no. 4 (May 5, 1936): 86.

⁸² Hughes, *I Was Made a Minister*, 281.

Bishop of Washington. At the same time, Hughes led the reunion talks, he also was President of the Board, lending his name to Sloan's statement opposing Board merger.⁸³

Because the Board had long adopted a normative whiteness as the basis for Methodist and American identity, with blackness being the exception, it is evident how race affected the effort to save the Board and the Methodist Building under the reunion. As the Plan of Union relied upon a common whiteness to achieve national reunion, Wilson's plan for the Methodist Building as the national headquarters also implicitly endorsed it. Far from sacrificing a principle of racial egalitarianism in the church or in American life, Wilson and the Board actually capitalized on the whiteness of the national ambitions for American Methodism in order to preserve the Board and protect the Methodist Building in the new denomination. When the Methodist Building serves as the point of departure for examining Methodist reunion, the institutional racism and normative whiteness of the new national church is apparent.

Conclusion

Wilson had saved the Methodist Building, but he would not continue to reside there or direct the work of the Board after General Conference. After holding the role for over two-dozen years, and overseeing the organization in Chicago, Topeka, and finally, Washington, D.C., Wilson retired from the position of General Secretary.⁸⁴ Wilson had been the chief executive and very public face of the Board from its inception, and the key visionary behind creating the Methodist Building. In his address to the General Conference upon announcement of his

⁸³ Moore, *The Long Road to Methodist Union*, 187; Hughes, *I Was Made a Minister*, 127–131; Woolever, *The Highroad of Methodism*, 36.

⁸⁴ The Board's new constitution, passed by the 1936 General Conference, transferred the election of the General Secretary of the Board from the managers to the General Conference itself. The revised constitution required that every episcopal region in the U.S. receive one member on the managers, totaling eighteen members, instead of mandating that two-thirds of members be from the D.C. area, as had been mandated by every *Book of Discipline* since 1916.

retirement, Wilson was candid about the stress the position had placed on his already fragile health. “I am on the firing line all the time,” he said, no doubt referring to the battery of criticism he received over the years and the long hours he worked. He told the General Conference that his greatest accomplishments as General Secretary were enhancing the Board’s profile as a national organization and establishing the Methodist Building, which he estimated was worth nearly two million dollars. Bishop Hughes, as president of the Board, spoke after Wilson, reiterating his appreciation for Wilson’s service and the tremendous legacy he would leave behind. He praised Wilson for advocating for temperance for over two decades, facing fierce criticism and courageously adhering to his beliefs. And Hughes, like Wilson, also honored him for the Methodist Building. “Few men have builded [*sic*] such a monument as Dr. Wilson’s work now bequeaths to us in the capital of our nation,” he said. “He was intrepid in his efforts to secure our magnificent property as he was in his public presentation of our cause,” said Bishop Hughes, connecting the Building with Wilson’s legacy. The Building was a visible symbol—a concretized monument—to Wilson’s unflagging dedication to public Protestantism and the causes of temperance, prohibition, and “public morals.”⁸⁵

However, the recognition of the Methodist Building as a monument at the end of Wilson’s career also implied the end of an era of public Protestantism. The Board would exist past the 1936 General Conference, remaining unscathed in part because of how Board members and Wilson worked to narrate the history and future of American Methodism. Yet, because the Methodist Building’s role was not expanded to become the new national church headquarters, the status quo actually indicates some degree of backing away from the mission of public Protestantism. Rather than take the opportunity to expand the Board’s mission or utilize the

⁸⁵ Edwin Holt Hughes, *Daily Christian Advocate* XXIII, no. 13 (May 14, 1936): 323-324.

Methodist Building as the national office, the General Conference made no changes to its mission or purpose. The decision to retain “public morals” in the Board’s title was motivated by legal reasons, not out of a desire to expand the Board’s efforts of public Protestantism. In fact, the fear of legal backlash suggests the decision of inaction represented a deliberate retreat from interjecting Protestant voices in public life. The caution exhibited in this decision stands in contrast to Wilson’s earlier assertions about the active role Protestantism ought to play shaping federal morality laws, and his bold claims that Protestantism influenced the creation of American democracy.

While the Board existed as an institution in the new national church, the racial segregation and decentralized church structure meant that the Methodist Building was not needed as a national headquarters. The task of determining what the Methodist Building represented, and what role Protestantism ought to play in American public life, would be up to future generations of Methodists in the successor denominations. Methodists in the later portions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would be compelled to determine what messages about Protestantism and American public life the building should represent, and if the Board funds needed to be, as some Methodists contended, “exclusively for the work of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, for whose purpose all the money raised has been paid and accepted in good faith.”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Oregon Conference, “Preservation Methodist Building,” Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, 1936, General Conference Records.

Epilogue: The Methodist Building and Post-Protestant America

During the month of May 2016, one hundred years to the month when the General Conference first directed the Board to relocate Washington, D.C., the General Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) granted Heritage Landmark status to the United Methodist Building (whose name was changed to match new name of the denomination). Over the interim century, the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals evolved, first in 1960, into the Board of Christian Social Concerns (BCSC) as the result of a series of mergers between the Boards of Temperance, World Peace, and Social and Economic Relations in the Methodist Church. In 1968, it evolved again into the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) in the successor denomination, the United Methodist Church.¹ The final renaming occurred during the mid-century Civil Rights and anti-war movements, and the new Board embraced a mission that encompassed a range of social justice causes, covering the former three Boards' portfolios including labor rights, civil rights, peace and antiwar activism. In addition, the previous dedication to temperance education and legal prohibition, evolved into more general concerns with public health and welfare.²

The new Board's identity altered the practical use of the Methodist Building: for the first time, temperance and alcohol were no longer the primary focuses of those who worked there. Instead, the center served as a gathering place for the mid-century civil rights, women's rights, and antiwar movements. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the tenants of the Methodist

¹ Methodist Church (U.S.) and Emory S. Bucke, *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1960* (Nashville: Methodist Pub. House, 1960), Board of Christian Social Concerns, §1526.

² *Ibid.*, §1535-1541. Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 8–11.

Building including a greater diversity of groups, included the Islamic Society of North America, Catholic World Relief Services, the National Council of Churches, and the Seventh-day Adventists, who had formerly criticized the Methodist Building in the periodical *Liberty* for violating the separation of church and state. Upon entering the building lobby, a visitor's eye would no longer go to the Victorian style furniture that had filled the space when it first opened, but instead look upward. In the mid-1980s, the Board printed two sets of Scripture passages across the lobby's rotunda.³ The side facing the Capitol Building included the verse from the Book of Micah, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God," while the side facing the Supreme Court Building included the text from the Book of Isaiah, "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares."⁴ The addition of verses from the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible illustrates how the new Board sought to craft a new identity through the Methodist Building. By evoking the prophets who decried systems of injustice in the Bible, the Board embraced an identity as outsiders at odds with the political establishment in Washington.⁵ Instead of claiming that Protestants had a right to govern as public Protestantism insisted, the new custodians of the Methodist Building used the site to position themselves as modern prophets, "speaking truth to power." Those inside the Methodist Building followed the mid-century transformation of mainline or "ecumenical" Protestants that historian David Hollinger had described, embracing a post-Protestant American culture that championed diversity, cultural and religious pluralism, and progressive politics.⁶

³ General Board of Church and Society, "Photo of rotunda," *Engage/Social Action*, February 1985.

⁴ Micah 6:8; Isaiah 2:4.

⁵ Daniel J. B. Hofrenning, *In Washington But Not of It: The Prophetic Politics of Religious Lobbyists* (Temple University Press, 1995), 7–11.

⁶ David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Steven M. Tipton, *Public Pulpits:*

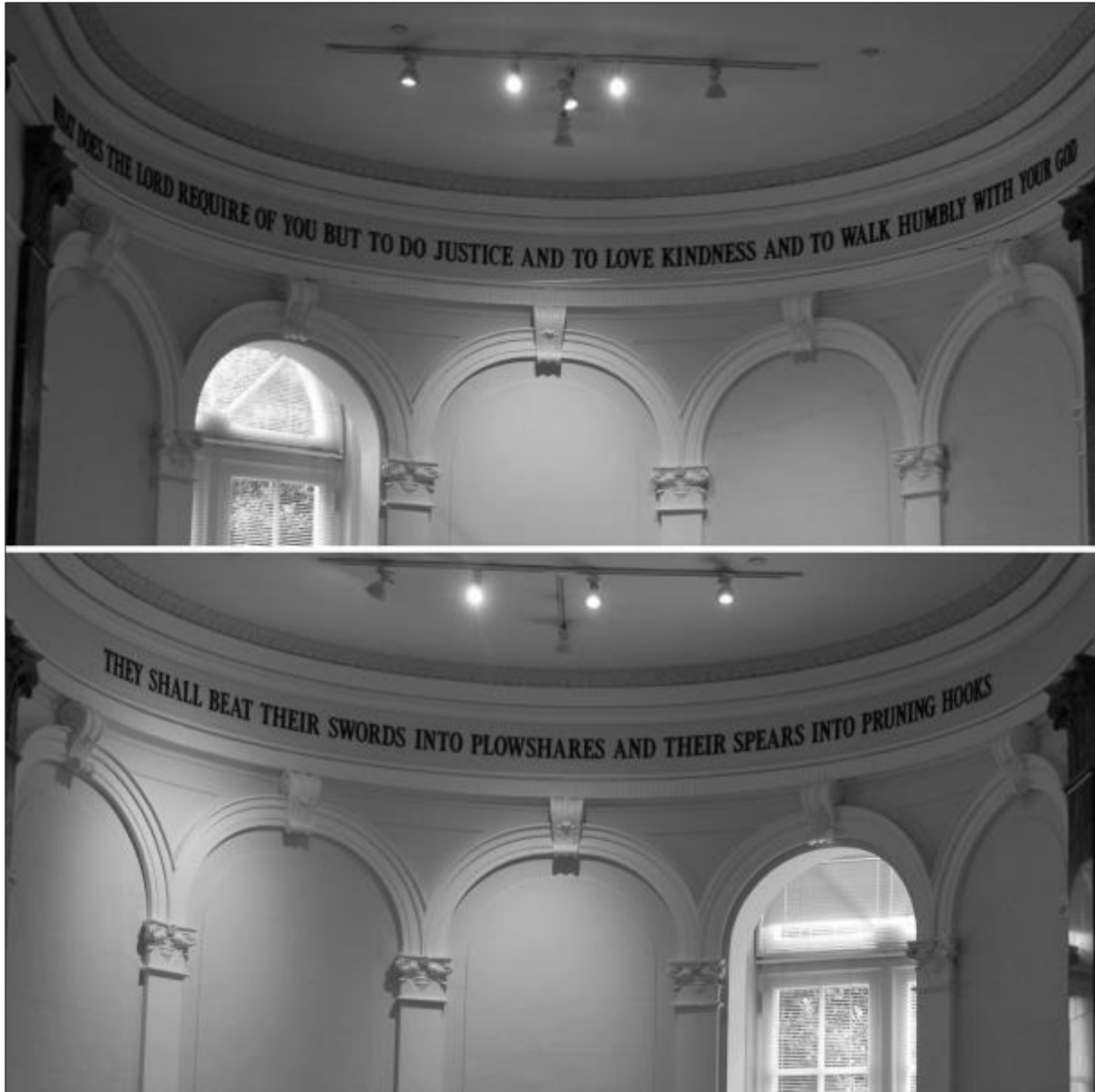


Figure 5.1 Photographs of the United Methodist Building rotunda. Courtesy of Clayton Childers. Used with permission.

The conferral of Heritage Landmark status to the now-United Methodist Building occurred with little fanfare or attention, but the significance of this action is best appreciated

Methodists and Mainline Churches in the Moral Argument of Public Life (University of Chicago Press, 2008); Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016).

within the acrimony of a divisive General Conference.⁷ Much as the 1936 MEC General Conference action that spared the Board and the Methodist Building should be situated in the context of debating a segregated merger proposal, the 2016 General Conference's action on the United Methodist Building also should be contextualized amid the division of that meeting. While the 1936 General Conference considered a divisive reunion proposal, the 2016 General Conference included rumors of a schism proposal to divide the church along theologically liberal and conservative lines in order to resolve different theological positions on homosexuality and the ordination of LGBT ministers. The resolution on making the United Methodist Building a heritage landmark merely added "the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill" to a paragraph on landmarks in the *Book of Discipline* without any debate or discussion at the assembly, but writing that same book of church law also entailed debating questions of exclusion, unity, and theological diversity.⁸ When the United Methodist Building is again foregrounded in this narrative, it is evident that the structure continued to be a contested space for the role of Protestantism and Methodism in American society.

The significance of the heritage landmark status to the United Methodist Building was increased by, and cannot be understood apart from, a 2008-2010 legal dispute over the proper use of building endowment funds. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the United Methodist

⁷ The 2016 General Conference missed several opportunities to draw connections to the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals. In addition to being the one-hundredth anniversary of the MEC's mandate to send the Board to Washington, the 2016 General Conference met in Portland, Oregon, Clarence True Wilson's adopted hometown and home conference, another parallel overlooked.

⁸ Alfred Day, III, Resolution to amend §1712 in the *2016 Book of Discipline*, <http://calms2016.umc.org/Menu.aspx?type=Petition&mode=Single&Number=266>. United Methodist Communications, "GC2016 to Consider 3 Sites for Heritage Landmarks," *The United Methodist Church*, 20, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/2016-gc-to-consider-three-sites-for-heritage-landmarks>.

Building emerged as a site of controversy between theological liberals and conservatives in the UMC. This dispute culminated in a lawsuit filed by the Board, in order to resolve whether it, as the successor organization to the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals, had misused donor funds for the Building when the Board's portfolio expanded beyond temperance. This epilogue examines the recent legal dispute to summarize the central claim of this dissertation: that the (United) Methodist Building has historically been a contested site over the meanings and history of Protestantism and Methodism in American public life. This epilogue examines the competing historical and theological narratives that theological liberals and theological conservatives articulated about the Methodist Building in order to illustrate how the Methodist Building became a site to grapple over the declining cultural relevance of Methodism in American society. The Board originally conceived of the building to represent its public Protestantism, asserting the right of Protestants to shape federal morality laws, but by the turn of the twenty-first century, the Methodist Building became a flashpoint in the broader debate about the proper role of the Methodism and Protestantism in American public life.

Theological Conservatives' Declension Narrative

The lawsuit over the United Methodist Building represented a proxy war between theological conservatives and theological liberals in the UMC. At least since the 1990s, theologically conservative "renewal" groups, including the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD), expressed concern with the liberal theological and political direction of the UMC. They blamed theological liberalism for the decline in membership in the UMC, the largest mainline Protestant denomination, and they urged the denomination to renew its commitment to

evangelical conversion.⁹ Because renewal groups attributed so much of the UMC's failings to its liberal political positions, the Board of Church and Society became a frequent target. In the 1990s and 2000s, they targeted the Board of Church and Society for its progressive stances on abortion rights, universal healthcare, anti-war, and anti-nuclear proliferation.¹⁰ Then-General Secretary James Winkler, a member of the UMC's liberal wing, gave renewal advocates plenty of fodder, as he used his office's platform to decry the Iraq War and call for the impeachment of President George W. Bush in a theatrical manner reminiscent of Clarence True Wilson's tirades against "wets."¹¹ While the UMC's Social Principles condemned war, championed universal healthcare access, environmentalism, civil rights, and a host of other liberal policy statements, conservatives, who were outvoted in most attempts to alter the liberal-leaning Social Principles, meanwhile griped that a vocal minority that did not accurately represent the UMC governed the Board.¹²

Furthermore, because the Board of Church and Society owned and used the United Methodist Building as its headquarters, Mark Tooley, the director of the IRD, and other renewal

⁹ These Methodists use the term "renewal" because they specifically want to renew, or restore, "theological orthodoxy" in the UMC and other mainline traditions. Theological orthodoxy meant a theologically and politically conservative orientation, want to focus on growing church membership instead of social issues. Renewal advocates specifically criticized the UMC for adopting social positions on supporting abortion access, advocating nuclear disarmament, opposing the war in Iraq, or critical statements of Israel. Renewal advocates also discouraged the adoption of accepting statements on homosexuality and the ordination of LGBTQ ministers. A few examples include, "More Political Resolutions," *UM Action*, Summer 2004; "United Methodists Uphold Christian Sexual Morality," *UM Action*, Summer 2004; "Methodist Theologian Explains United Methodism's Decline," *UM Action*, Winter 2009; "United Methodist Lobby Signs Then Withdraws from Abortion Letter," *UM Action*, Winter 2009.

¹⁰ "Church Board Hosts Partisan Political Attack," *UM Action*, Summer 2004; "Church Lobby's Trust Violation Continues," *UM Action*, Summer 2004.

¹¹ "United Methodist Lobbyist Demands Bush Impeachment," *UM Action*, Spring 2006.

¹² United Methodist Church (U.S.), *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 2004. (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Pub. House, 2004) §160-166.

advocates, said the Capitol Hill building epitomized what ailed the denomination. As the introduction explained, Tooley described the transformation of twentieth-century Methodism from the perspective of the activities at the building. “The patriarchs of the Old Temperance Board had seen a nation that was bound for Zion. But their ecclesial successors saw only a corrupt and oppressive America, whose innate racism, greed and imperialism could be overthrown only through the most radical action,” he wrote.¹³ Tooley’s characterization of the Board under Wilson’s leadership is relatively accurate, as Wilson first envisioned the Methodist Building to be a platform for Protestants to shape federal morality laws. The Board’s shift from its focus on temperance to peace and justice causes over the twentieth century did represent an organic change in the status of Methodism, and mainline Protestantism more generally, in American society. To Tooley, the shift away from public Protestantism represented neglect of its purpose on Capitol Hill. “The Methodist Building’s story illustrates the larger epic of liberal Protestantism, which, after decades of implosion, is fast drawing to a close,” wrote Tooley, even using the building’s former name.¹⁴

Tooley did not merely lament the changing status of the United Methodist Building and yearn nostalgically for the earlier temperance board. Critical to Tooley’s declension narrative of the Methodist Building was his argument that the successor agency, the Board of Church and Society, had misused the building and its funds in order to promote liberal political and social values. While renewal advocates did try to reform the UMC social positions to become more conservative, they also operated in coded language. For example, Tooley submitted a resolution to General Conference that proposed restricting the Board of Church and Society’s work to

¹³ Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, 97.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

“temperance and alcohol problems” because of the assets it inherited from the old Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals.¹⁵ Though this petition did not pass at the 2004 General Conference, it revealed the argument that Tooley and other renewal advocates would continue to make in order to discredit the Board of Church and Society. By drawing attention to the funds that the Board of Church and Society inherited from the Board of Temperance, renewal advocates questioned the legality of the Board’s actions, arguing the assets should not be used to further successor Board’s liberal positions.¹⁶

To make the claim that the Board of Church and Society had misused funds designated for temperance, renewal advocates pointed to the 1965 Declaration of Trust, which established a Methodist Building Endowment Fund. The Trust document was a relatively obscure legal document drawn up after the former Boards of Temperance, World Peace, and Social and Economic Relations combined in the 1960s. (Because the Board of Temperance operated and owned the Methodist Building, it was the wealthiest of the three boards.) According to Tooley, the former Board of Temperance, which was demoted to the Division of Alcohol Problems, created the Declaration of Trust “no doubt fearing further inroads on its autonomy and foreseeing the dwindling interest in alcohol concerns by the new regime.”¹⁷ He added that the 1965 Declaration of Trust “sought to guarantee that these assets would remain devoted to ‘purposes for which the funds were originally given, that is to say, work in the areas of temperance and alcohol problems,’” wrote Tooley, quoting the document in question.¹⁸ In a front page 2004

¹⁵ Petition 40367, *Daily Christian Advocate* (May 7, 2004): 181. Tooley writes he submitted the petition to the 2004 General Conference calling for the Board of Church and Society to comply with the assets of the former Board. Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, 104.

¹⁶ “UM Church Lobby Violates Trust and Donors’ Restrictions,” *UM Action*, Spring 2004.

¹⁷ Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, 102.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

article in Tooley's *UM Action Briefing* newsletter, Tooley discussed the Declaration of Trust to raise speculation that the current Board of Church and Society was abusing its endowment from owning the United Methodist Building. He asked, "Has the management of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (BCS) wrongly spent on far-left political activism many millions of dollars that could lawfully be used only for work on alcohol problems?" Tooley answered his own question: "The Trust Agreement includes a detailed history showing that this entire Trust Fund consisted of contributions restricted by the donors for work on temperance and alcohol problems."¹⁹

Tooley characterized the contemporary Board of Church and Society as "lobby" for politically liberal causes, including "abortion rights, socialized medicine, expanded welfare programs, and opposition to U.S. military programs," in contrast to maintaining fidelity to the Trust.²⁰ Tooley's choice to call the Board a lobby is significant. Both "Methodist lobby" and "liberal lobby" appeared frequently in his organization's publications. Though Tooley and *UM Action* never displayed awareness of the history of lobby allegations by the *Christian Century*, Senator Copeland, and Congressman Tinkham seventy years earlier, renewal advocates used the word lobby to a very similar effect. In each, the word connotes a pernicious entity attempting to exert undue influence and promote a minoritarian viewpoint. Though by 2004 the terms of the lobby had flipped: instead of imposing a conservative Protestant Christian morality, the so-called lobby imposed liberal political and social values, diversity, and pluralism.

Tooley's decision to raise the 1965 Declaration of Trust was effective for retelling the Board's history of mid-century mergers as one of bureaucratic excess, misdirection and fiduciary

¹⁹ "UM Church Lobby Violates Trust and Donors' Restrictions," *UM Action*, Spring 2004.

²⁰ Ibid.

abuse. It allowed Tooley to argue the Board overlooked its founding purpose of temperance, and cast the modern-day Methodist Building as a site of corruption and wanton abuse. Instead of describing the mergers as facilitating a more capacious understanding of peace and justice in the context of the Civil Rights Era and Vietnam War, Tooley described the 1960 merger as creating a bureaucratic nightmare, enabling the new Board of Christian Social Concerns to become unwieldy and distracted from the mission of promoting temperance.²¹ “The eventual rulers of the Methodist Building, were in contrast, distrustful and resentful over the [temperance] movement and nation that had endowed them,” Tooley wrote, continuing “These new elites were far more interested in the church’s [*sic*] addressing more provocative issues of social justice.”²² In the *UM Action* article, Tooley immediately jumped from the creation of the Trust in 1965, to the early 2000s when the Board of Church and Society treated the Trust Fund as unrestricted assets, painting the successor Board as blatantly defying the law.²³ In his subsequent book chapter, Tooley recounted a more detailed history of bureaucratic dysfunction, writing how in the 1970s, the newly created Board of Church and Society reinterpreted the Trust “to justify expenditures outside of ‘temperance and alcohol problems’ by the now increasingly radicalized GBCS.”²⁴

The Methodist Building Endowment Trust

Tooley’s financial history of the Board since the 1960s painted a damning portrait, but it also overlooked the very lively debate Board leaders had had over the creation and meaning of the Trust. As Tooley writes, the Board of Christian Social Concerns did draw up a Declaration of Trust in March 1965 that proposed restricting the Methodist Building Endowment to temperance

²¹ Bucke, *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1960, Board of Christian Social Concerns*, §1526.

²² Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, 98, 101.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 102-103.

work. The Division of Alcohol Problems, which was the successor to the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals, and therefore legal owner of the Methodist Building, wanted to protect its assets by creating a Declaration of Trust that proposed restricting the existing funds to work on alcohol and temperance, establishing a “Methodist Building Endowment Fund.” This legal document also recounted a historical narrative of the Methodist Building. “A number of large bequests were obtained, for example a large bequest came from the family of Bishop Matthew Simpson to be used for endowment purposes for work in temperance and alcohol problems,” referencing both the Simpson daughters’ wills and their donations for the Simpson Memorial Chapel. The Trust document continued, noting that the bequests were also designated “for a headquarters building in the Nation’s capital to include offices for the performance of such work,” connecting the purpose of the Methodist Building with temperance, just as Wilson did during his tenure. The document concluded, “These assets...have been impressed with a trust-in-fact for them to be used and applied for the purposes for which they were given—for work in the areas of temperance and alcohol.”²⁵ In forming their rationale to restrict the Building Endowment for the Board’s founding concern, the Division also cited the latest edition of the book of church law, the *Discipline*, which stated that for the new BCSC, “Funds vested in any of the predecessor boards shall be conserved for the exclusive use of the appropriate division of this board and for the specific purposes for which funds have been given.”²⁶

However, Tooley’s history of the Methodist Building Endowment and Declaration of

²⁵ “Declaration of Trust, The Methodist Building Endowment Fund,” March 23, 1965, DAPGW (Division of Alcohol Problems and General Welfare) - Finance Endowment Trust Agreement for Methodist Building, 1965-1967, Records of the General Welfare Division of the General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

²⁶ Ibid, 2a, quoting Bucke, *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, 1960, Board of Christian Social Concerns, §1525.

Trust elided the thoughtful and complex deliberations among the Board's staff and executive committee over this very topic throughout the remainder of the 1960s and 1970s. In October 1965, only seven months after the Trust was created, the General Secretary A. Dudley Ward chafed at the restrictions on the funds. He contended that the Board of Christian Social Concerns, not the Division of Alcohol Problems, owned the funds and therefore ought to control the Trust. In October 1965, Ward proposed such a revision to the Declaration of Trust, making it become more expansive, not restricting its funds to alcohol and temperance but reading its history as a broader one concerned with social reform theology.²⁷ Discussion and revision of the trust continued into the 1970s, when the Board had once again changed names to the current iteration as the General Board of Church and Society in the new United Methodist Church. Once again, the directors of the Board reexamined the Trust and had recommended a more expansive reading of the Trust funds. As the executive committee of the Board of Church and Society examined the organization's finances in the fall of 1972, it turned to the inclusion of "Public Morals" in the original Board's name to seek an answer to how to use the funds beyond Prohibition or alcohol work. "The consensus of legal minds, written records and precedent do justify such expenditures under the umbrella PUBLIC MORALS," the executive committee minutes recorded.²⁸ Later in the decade, the Board returned to the same rationale when studying the Trust, "The term 'public morals' should be given a liberal interpretation," wrote the Board in a resolution, and suggested that the Trust assets be used for work beyond alcohol and temperance.²⁹

²⁷ Executive Committee minutes, Division of Alcohol Problems and General Welfare, October 18, 1965, General Board of Church and Society legal documents, volume 3, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey (hereafter cited as GBCS Legal Documents).

²⁸ Executive Committee of the Committee on Finance and Investments minutes, November 7, 1972, GBCS Legal Documents.

²⁹ Division of General Welfare minutes, October 3-4, 1979, GBCS Legal Documents.

By overlooking the Board's internal debates over the meaning and proper use of the Trust, Tooley cherry picked a roughly forty-year-old legal document to allege that the Board had misused its building funds. Tooley provided no historical context to the 1965 Declaration of Trust document, enabling him to argue that the Board was intentionally misusing its funds. Tooley's narrative argued that the Board's series of administrative mergers had distracted the organization from its founding mission of temperance education. "Unable to garner their own support, these new church lobbyists instead had to disguise their purposes and finagle funds that were originally devoted to temperance," wrote Tooley, connecting the growing liberalism of Methodism with alleged fiscal irresponsibility in the Methodist Building.³⁰ In reality, this overlooked the thoughtful and contentious process that the Boards went through to examine the proper use of the funds. As a result, this indicated how Tooley's speculative claims about the dubious legality of the United Methodist Building therefore connected politics and theology with a physical building. When rebutting Tooley's history and theological diagnosis of twentieth-century American Methodism, the leaders of the Board of Church and Society also explained their story through the United Methodist Building.

The Board Seeks a Legal Decision

"I have not found a single shred of evidence to indicate any abuse of funds," *UM Action* quoted then-General Secretary James Winkler as saying. Winkler and his Board interpreted Tooley's allegations about misusing the United Methodist Building Endowment as deliberately spreading misinformation in order to undermine the work of the Board of Church and Society, further noting that Winkler had consulted with legal counsel on using endowment funds for

³⁰ Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church*, 107-108.

general operating expenses.³¹ After several years of allegations of misusing funds, Winkler and the Trustees elected in 2007 decided to request a declaratory decision from the D.C. Superior Court. The Board filed the suit in order to put the rumors about misusing the endowment to rest.³² In October 2008, the Board presented its materials for the trial, in which it claimed that the Declaration of Trust had been revised and expanded from its original form in March 1965. It was incumbent upon the Board of Church and Society to provide enough evidence to convince the judge that the Board's reading was an accurate one.³³ Though the judge was evaluating law and not theology, both the theologically liberal Board and Tooley's theologically conservative renewal Methodists saw the legal opinion, should it be in their favor, as ratifying their respective political and theological understanding of Methodism at the turn of the twenty-first century. The stakes behind the legal decision were high for both the Board and the renewal Methodists, who subsequently filed a brief arguing that the Trust was restricted to alcohol and temperance work.

When the Judge Rhonda Reid Winston released her decision almost two years later, in 2010, she found that the Board did not misuse funds by extending its work beyond alcohol and temperance. She argued that the original 1965 Declaration of Trust was plagued with historical and legal inaccuracies, thus the initial restrictions placed on the Building Endowment were flawed from inception. Key to Winston's reasoning was the former Board's title of "Public Morals," as she noted that the Board had opposed lewd films, narcotics, and tobacco along with alcohol from its earliest incorporation in the District of Columbia. The pledge cards used to raise

³¹ "Agency Rejects Church & Society Audit Over Methodist Building," *UM Action*, Fall 2005.

³² Trustees minutes, April 13, 2005, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

³³ "Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law Submitted by Petitioner General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church," General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church v. District of Columbia, 2007 TRP 4 (D.C. 2010).

funds for the Methodist Building also proved to be critical. Winston noted that the donations did not explicitly state that the funds were to be used for temperance, and precedent in charitable donor law allowed donations to be used for a range of purposes if not expressly restricted. Though Wilson framed his opposition to merger in 1936 as an act that would violation donors' wishes and potentially violate the law, Winston's opinion found a different conclusion. She determined that the 1965 Declaration of Trust was mistaken for assuming that there were ever restrictions on the donations. The remaining pledge cards mention building a "Permanent Protestant Building at the Nation's Capital" or a "National Methodist Headquarters in Washington, D.C." Though the old Board's full name of "Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals" is printed on the cards, Winston determined the pledge cards never imposed a restriction on the use of the funds for temperance.³⁴

After the Decision: A Liberal Sacred Site

Immediately after the ruling, the Board of Church and Society celebrated the decision as a vindication of its work and theological outlook. In the Board's press release about the decision, Winkler announced that the Board had had a historic commitment to combatting alcohol and substance abuse. The article later mentioned the history of the Building and the Board, noting the board came to DC in 1916 and began building in 1922. However, the press release focused on the post-1960s and 1970s events that happened in or near the building, highlighting the building's connections to African Americans, women, Native Americans, poor and homeless people. Even as the Board acknowledged its founding as a temperance organization, it soon

³⁴ "Court Rules Methodist Agency in D.C. Is Not Limited in Advocacy," *Christian Century*, October 13, 2010; "Superior Court Rules in Favor of General Board of Church & Society," *Faith in Action*, October 7, 2010; General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church v. District of Columbia.

turned to a more expansive narrative of peace and justice, finding vindication in the court's reading of the pledge cards and the Board's capacious title of "Public Morals."³⁵

Because of the decade of legal turmoil over the status of the United Methodist Building, the 2016 Heritage Landmark designation represented a quiet, yet significant symbolic victory for the wing of religious liberals in the UMC. The Board's current General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, who had succeeded Winkler in 2014, has made the space of the United Methodist Building a key part of her tenure in the position. As the first woman in the position, with her fire-red hair and South Carolina low country drawl, Henry-Crowe cuts a considerably different figure than her predecessor Wilson. However, the current General Secretary follows the path of her predecessor by speaking frequently about the Building, including at the Wilson's former church in Portland, Oregon.³⁶ Though she is careful to never state explicitly, Henry-Crowe's celebration of the United Methodist Building suggests an embrace of liberal Protestant values at a time when membership in the UMC, and mainline Protestantism more generally, are waning in American society. Henry-Crowe, a Southern clergywoman who earned a reputation as a theological liberal in the UMC for her support of LGBT inclusion in the church, appreciates the stakes in her public embrace of the United Methodist Building. In her previous role as the Dean of the Chapel at Emory University, she first gained attention when she allowed the chapel to be used for a same-sex union ceremony in 1997, and then further gained prominence as a

³⁵ "Superior Court Rules in Favor of General Board of Church & Society."

³⁶ "Guest Preachers: Sept. 20 - Susan Henry Crowe, General Secretary of the UM Board of Church and Society.," *Circuit Rider: First United Methodist Church of Portland* 23, no. 18 (September 9, 2015): 1.

theological liberal in the church while serving on the Judicial Council, the UMC's highest judicial body that interprets church law.³⁷

Having cemented a reputation as a theological liberal, Henry-Crowe describes the United Methodist Building as a center for such values in the church. In her letter following General Conference, Henry-Crowe celebrated the designation of the Building as a Heritage Landmark. "Conceived out of the principles of Methodism's commitment to peace-building and justice, the historic building has contributed in vital ways to the mission of justice, reconciliation and the prophetic voice of the Church for almost a century," Henry-Crowe wrote about the conferral of heritage landmark status.³⁸ Her retelling of the history of the United Methodist Building is distinct from Wilson's description of the building as a "bone-dry monument" to Prohibition and an expression of Methodism's power and influence. Instead of embracing the building as a symbol of public Protestantism, Henry-Crowe situated the United Methodist Building in a post-Protestant American culture amid values of peace, justice, and reconciliation. In a Board article about the pending Heritage Landmark status, the editor Wayne Rhodes described the Building as a historical actor present at particular moments in post-Civil Rights history. Rhodes wrote:

The building is significant for the role it has played at turning points in U.S. history. These include the 1963 March on Washington led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; the 1968 Poor People's March; the farmworkers' boycott; years of protest against the Vietnam War;

³⁷ Associated Press, "Emory Offers a Narrow Way for Gay Marriages," *The New York Times*, November 15, 1997; "Emory University Oks Gay 'Marriages'—with A Catch," *Chicago Tribune*, November 14, 1997; Kevin Eckstrom, "Methodist Court Says Pastors May Bar Gays from Membership: No Automatic Right to Membership," *Christian Century*, accessed April 17, 2017, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2005-11/methodist-court-says-pastors-may-bar-gays-membership>. The Judicial Council was first created in the 1939 Plan of Union that merged the MEC and MECS into the Methodist Church. The body was continued when the new denomination, the UMC, was formed in 1968, and is popularly described as the denomination's Supreme Court.

³⁸ Susan Henry Crowe, "From the Desk of Susan Henry Crowe: A Reflection on General Conference 2016" May 25, 2016.

Equal Rights [*sic*] Amendment marches; the 1978 Longest Walk of Native Americans; and the 1989 Housing NOW! March.

The only mention he gives to Prohibition is in a statement on how the Building was constructed “under the auspices of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals.” Even when Rhodes mentioned that William Jennings Bryan spoke at the Building opening, Rhodes described the political figure as “a tireless advocate for world peace,” not an ardent Prohibitionist or the celebrity politician who argued against Darwinian evolution in favor of fundamentalist Christianity during the [1925] Scopes trial.³⁹

The denomination’s chief historian, Rev. Alfred Day, III, acknowledged the Building’s history with Prohibition more directly than Rhodes or Henry-Crowe, but recast it as a center of ecumenical Protestantism concerned with public health and social welfare. He described the building as representing “a different kind of temperance than the ‘roaring twenties’ ever imagined...” The building, Day continued, “has been concerned with ever-widening forms of moderation and sobriety, and virtues of justice, liberation and peace not only for Methodists, but for all people worldwide.” His remarks were either unaware of or overlooked Wilson’s staunch American exceptionalism and immigrant xenophobia. By framing Prohibition as a justice-minded public health campaign for moderation, Day not only elided the normative Protestant cultural values people like Wilson hoped to impose with Prohibition; he also recast the building to represent late-twentieth and twenty-first century liberal Protestant values of pluralism, social justice, and progressivism. He noted that the Methodist Building was “the first Protestant agency to locate in Washington, D.C.,” but he elided the Board’s anti-Catholicism animating their initial

³⁹ Wayne C. Rhodes, “United Methodist Building Designated Historic Site: Baltimore-Washington Conference Approves Designation,” *Faith in Action*, June 8, 2015, <https://umc-gbcs.org/faith-in-action/united-methodist-building-designated-historic-site>.

decision to build. “From the beginning, the Methodist Building represented a broad-minded place. Ecumenical concerns were and continue to be prominent,” said Day. However, Wilson’s papers reveal—held in the same building where Day has an office—Wilson openly encouraged donations to the Methodist Building in order to “curb the Catholic inroads on Government.”⁴⁰ Day cited the Board’s title of “Public Morals” as evidence of its “broad-minded,” ecumenical outlook, but the Board’s fierce opposition to the *Christian Century*, as well as Wilson’s tirades against Catholics, immigrants, and Tammany Hall Democrats, paints a different picture than the open-minded pluralism that Day lionized. Day further described the United Methodist Building as “a real life, practical divinity center.” He described the building as a physical embodiment of Methodism’s theological values of “taking the Gospel to where the people are, even to the remotest and most difficult places,” characterizing the Board as akin to nineteenth-century itinerant Methodists, while overlooking how Wilson and McDowell sought to situate the Board at the center of power.⁴¹ These historical elisions and exaggerations accomplished important work for framing UMC identity at the turn of the twenty-first century. By reinterpreting the Board’s early history in this manner, Henry-Crowe, Rhodes, and Day framed the United Methodist Building as a site of liberal Protestant peace and justice concerns instead of a site to promote public Protestantism. Their historical narratives cast the Building as a sacred site for liberal, ecumenical Protestantism and for social justice movements.

⁴⁰ Clarence True Wilson to Clara Koons, December 1926, letter, GBCS Legal Documents.

⁴¹ Alfred Day, III, “‘Real-Life, Practical Divinity Center’: United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill 91 Years of Age,” *Faith in Action*, March 9, 2015, <https://umc-gbcs.org/faith-in-action/real-life-practical-divinity-center>.

Conclusion

The turn-of-the-twenty-first-century legal dispute over the United Methodist Building and its endowment illustrates how the building persisted as a contested site, where people fought over the meanings of Methodism in American public life. The 2010 lawsuit and the controversy over the use of the endowment that precipitated it reveal how the United Methodist Building served as a space to grapple with the transformations of American Methodism and its changing place in American culture and politics over the twentieth century. Through debate about the meaning and proper use of the Declaration of Trust, Methodists used the United Methodist Building to engage in a discussion about how the Board and its building transformed from a Prohibition organization in the early twentieth century, to an ecumenical, liberal Protestant center embracing social justice and diversity by the century's close. That the United Methodist Building became a sort of ground zero for the changing nature of public Protestantism reveals how the building continues to sit at the fault lines of American Methodist identity.

That Tooley censured the twenty-first century Board of Church and Society for its custodianship of the Methodist Building by calling the organization “a liberal lobby” is demonstrative of how the building is a contested space. The words echo those of journalist Arthur Sears Henning, who called the Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals a “church lobby” in 1929. While each observer used the term “lobby” for different ends—Tooley used it to criticize the Board for being too accommodating toward culture; Henning to censure it for being too eager to intervene in shaping culture—both uses of the term highlight how a building that symbolized public Protestantism could spark tremendous controversy. As a building first founded to honor Prohibition and assert Protestant morality in the federal government, the Methodist Building has been a site of frequent contestation over which groups

are a part of that “public Protestantism,” how that public role ought to relate to politics and the state, and how to narrate and describe the history of Protestantism in American social reform and social movements.

In this dissertation, I have examined how the Methodist Building illustrates the denomination’s aspirations for public Protestantism during the Prohibition era. Close examination of the Board’s efforts to construct the Methodist Building and invest it with religious significance during this period reveals how the organization capitalized upon the Prohibition reform movement to claim moral and cultural authority in society. Instead of a clandestine network of Protestant influence in seemingly secular institutions, the history of the Methodist Building and the Board leaders who built it expose the public role of Protestantism in American culture. Over four chronological chapters, this dissertation closely examines the period of design, fundraising, construction, expansion, and institutional preservation. It follows the Board’s desire to construct a building in Washington, D.C. in order to announce the MEC’s national ambitions. Fearing the influences of Catholicism in the nation’s capital, the Board wanted to construct a Methodist Building as a Protestant counterpart on Capitol Hill. This dissertation studies the material culture and public ceremonies that the Board employed to invest the new Methodist Building as a platform for public Protestantism that would reform the nation. It argues that the Board’s public Protestantism generated controversy for the Methodist Building. The 1929 investigation over whether the Board used its building as a “church lobby” explores how the Methodist Building acted as a site to debate the proper relationship between Protestantism and politics. Finally, the dissertation argues that the Board inserted the Methodist Building into the ongoing reunion effort between the MEC and MECS in a campaign to make the Methodist Building in Washington, D.C. the headquarters of the new national church.

Collectively, the period from 1916 to 1936 reveals how the Methodist Building was a contested space, exposing the tensions of race, nation, religion, and politics in twentieth-century American Methodist identity.

This case study of the Methodist Building invites scholars to reconsider early twentieth-century institution building. Rather than treat Methodist institution building during this period as an afterthought or even a declension to nineteenth-century revivalism and itinerant preachers, this dissertation demonstrates how institution building enabled Methodism to claimed recognition as part of the Protestant establishment. A deeper appreciation of the institutions and physical structures Methodists built during the early twentieth century helps to explain how this religious tradition transitioned from a revivalist movement to become a part of the Protestant mainline establishment. It further argues for increased attention to the religious history of Washington, D.C., institution building in mainline Protestantism more broadly, and the co-constitution of religious and racial identities of Methodists and mainline Protestants.

This is a study of a *Methodist* Building, featuring Methodist individuals, publications, and institutions, however, the examination of this building contains important implications for the study of twentieth-century mainline Protestantism. Since the 1960s, the Methodist Building has been an ecumenical, and now interfaith, space, and since its inception, the building was to intended to be a center to promote Protestant morality in Washington, D.C. In both aspiration and in subsequent practice, the owners and residents of the building envisioned the stakes of the Methodist Building as broader than just for Methodism.⁴² The Methodist Building is no more representative than the Riverside Church, a prominent national church in New York City that

⁴² Clarence True Wilson, "The Church in Unending Fight for Moral Issues," *Christian Advocate*, April 7, 1921; Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, 8–14; John Dart, "From Gotham City to Capitol Hill," *Christian Century*, March 20, 2013.

exemplifies the twentieth-century institutionalization of mainline Protestantism, but like the Riverside Church, the Methodist Building embraces a sort of mainline Protestant synecdoche: the very exceptionality of each structure represents the political and institutional aspirations of mainline Protestantism in general. Because of the Riverside Church's unique prominence, historians note that the church embraces a mantle as the leader of mainline Protestantism's theological liberalism. Likewise, the custodians of the Methodist Building have similarly used the site as representative of the whole of Protestantism in American public life.⁴³ Its exceptionality helps us better appreciate the aspiration for mainline Protestantism in American society, and the institutional network that Protestants built in order to assert public Protestantism. At a historical moment when Protestantism is no longer the majority faith in the United States and when membership in Methodism declines, buildings like the Methodist Building do indeed provide a "firm foundation" to retain an establishment identity.

⁴³ Peter J. Paris et al., *The History of the Riverside Church in the City of New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Gregory Kipp Gilmore-Clough, "The Social Is Personal: Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Riverside Church, and the Social Gospel in the Great Depression" (PhD dissertation, Temple University, 2014); Alfred Day, III, "'Real-Life, Practical Divinity Center': United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill 91 Years of Age"; Wayne C. Rhodes, "United Methodist Building Designated Historic Site: Baltimore-Washington Conference Approves Designation."

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