

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**II-11**

### National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church

other names/site number First United Methodist Church of Aurora/029-029-51084

#### 2. Location

street & number 304 Third Street N/A not for publication

city or town Aurora N/A vicinity

state Indiana code IN county Dearborn code 029 zip code 47001

#### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Indiana Department of Natural Resources  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church  
Name of Property

Dearborn County, Indiana  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19th CENTURY/Greek Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE:limestone

walls BRICK

STONE:limestone

roof ASPHALT

other WOOD:weatherboard (steeple)

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheets

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1855-1862

**Significant Dates**

N/A

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Allen, William

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheets

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

First United Methodist Church of Aurora  
DePauw University, Greencastle, IN

Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church  
Name of Property

Dearborn County, Indiana  
County and State

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

1	6
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6	8	1	6	4	0
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4	3	2	4	8	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

2 

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3 

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Zone Easting Northing

4 

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See continuation sheet

#### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

#### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jeffrey L. Huntington, Executive Director

organization Hillforest Historical Foundation date September 25, 1993

street & number 213 Fifth Street telephone (812) 926-0087

city or town Aurora state IN zip code 47001

#### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

#### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church

street & number 1100 West 42nd Street telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Indianapolis state IN zip code 46208

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church Dearborn County Indiana

Narrative Statement of Description

The Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church, today known as the First United Methodist Church of Aurora, is an excellent example of mid-nineteenth century, mid-western, Greek Revival religious architecture. The church is located one block from the main commercial area of the city and is on a street which in the nineteenth century, as it is today, was one of mixed uses. The building is set back slightly from the street and sidewalk and has city alleys on the west and north sides of the property.

The two-story, gable-front church is 45'6" x 95' (including the 14' nineteenth century addition to the north). It is constructed of brick laid up in a common bond pattern. The south or front facade consists of three evenly spaced bays spanning the second story. They rest on a slightly protruding, cut limestone, first floor facade. Added in 1903, this limestone front is made up of three parts: a three-foot high, smooth-face foundation; a horizontally-banded mid-section; and a raised cornice. A blind window, topped by a keystone, flanks each side of the central projecting entry. This middle portal possesses a raised limestone surround consisting of plain elongated bases, pilasters with recessed panels, plain capitals and a recessed panel over the doorway; it is topped by a broken pediment with a raked cornice. The tympanum of the pediment contains a central, stylized scrolled medallion with oak leaves and acorns to the left and reeds or palm leaves to the right. Access to the building is via a pair of wooden doors with round-arched stained glass windows, topped by a colored glass transom; these replacements were introduced in 1954.

Four brick pilasters divide the second story, and create three recessed bays. The pilasters differ from the main wall surface in that they consist of stretcher bond brick work. Resting on a plain limestone band course, they have no bases but do possess simple stepped capitals. Each bay is dominated by a round-arched window opening with a cut stone sill and a graduated stone lintel punctuated by a stone keystone. The lintels are supported by a stepped limestone string course which spans each of these recessed panels. The openings contain early twentieth century colored glass divided into squares horizontally, vertically, and diagonally by wooden mullions in a single sash. A

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pediment caps the front facade, with its full entablature supported by the second story pilasters. The architrave along with the frieze, is made up of alternative courses of brick and limestone moldings. The pediment features a raked cornice with pressed tin modillions and egg-and-dart trim.

Near the front of the roof, along the ridge, resides a belfry. A square tin covered base serves as a foundation and has a small door in the north side. The middle portion of this feature is stepped back from the base. Sheathed in shiplap vertical siding, it possesses paired corner pilasters sharing common bases and capitals and louvered openings on each face. Originally, above this belfry, there was a shorter, stepped wooden tower section with an octagonal spire on an octagonal base. These were removed in April 1934 because of safety concerns; only eight years earlier, effort had been made to strengthen the steeple. The current eight-sided copper spire was added in 1950.

The east and west facades of the building mirror one another. The walls are brick in a common bond pattern and there is a random-coursed limestone foundation. At the corners closest to the south, there are recessed panels created by the pilasters that turn the corners. The stone band course between the first and second floors, along with the architrave and frieze, all turn the corner from the front facade and extend the length of this one recessed bay. On the east facade there is an additional capital at the north end of the depression for another pilaster; however, this is not true on the west facade. Under the recessed panel on the east there is a modern steel door with cast concrete sill and lintel (1954), while on the west there is a small, square, single pane window with a cut stone sill and lintel, probably from the late 19th century.

On the east and west facades of the original building there are four windows on the first and second floors. All have stone sills and lintels. The window openings on the first floor are paired and have multiple panes of colored glass with metal mullions (1954). The center section opens horizontally on side swivel hinges. Under the glassed area there are wooden panels. Below the cut stone window sill of the first floor, windows opening to the basement were inserted in 1954, but are deeply

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recessed and look like a continuation of the windows above. There is an exterior basement stairwell on the east side below the last windows nearest the northeast corner.

The upper windows are for the sanctuary and contain late nineteenth century stained glass. They are comprised of a three part wooden sash. There is a city alley on the west side of the property and there is a strip of land along the east side which allows natural light into the building. There is an external chimney located on the west facade between the first and second windows nearest the southwest corner. The building has boxed gutters on the east and west facades with a plain fascia board below. The roof is of low pitch and is covered with asphalt.

The rear or north facade has a one-story addition which was added between 1885 and 1888 used as an education room. It is of red brick in a common bond pattern with a foundation of rough cut limestone, and a hip asphalt shingle roof. On the west side, at the point where the addition connects with the main building, there is a slightly projecting pier to support the corner of the original building. The west side of the addition contains a window which is slightly taller than those on the first floor of the main building. It, like the other windows in the addition, has stone sills and lintels and the colored glass windows from the 1954 remodeling. There are two identical paired windows on the north wall. Located below the inner bottom corner of these two windows are two small vent openings (bricked over) with brick header segmental arches. There are raked, boxed eaves with a wide cornice board below. At the northeast corner, there is a small one story clapboard encased entrance that extends to the building on the east. A pair of two-over-two wooden windows appear on the north wall of this feature, with a modern door facing the south.

On the rear or north facade, above the 1880s addition, there is a one story addition located near the northeast corner which dates from 1963. This choir room has a slightly sloped roof and is constructed of contemporary materials. On the second floor near the northwest corner there is a large round opening containing a stained glass window (1888). It has a cut stone surround.

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The interior of the church has been changed numerous times since its original construction. Board of Trustee's minutes indicate that these rooms were finished after the sanctuary above and served the functional needs of the congregation. The current first floor configuration, except for the entrance/stair hall, dates from the 1954 remodeling.

Upon entering the church building there is a hall which runs along the front of the building and there are two staircases which lead to the second floor sanctuary, one to the west and one to the east. Each stairs has an oak newel post with square base and an octagonal shaft topped by a cherry railing. The space between the risers and the railing is enclosed with painted tongue and groove wainscoating which surrounds the lower hall. Under the west stairs, a restroom and a built-in telephone booth has been installed, probably in the early 20th century. During the 1954 remodeling, it was decided to put a basement under the church; this is entered from under the east stairs. There is also an exterior door on the east stairs. There is also an exterior door on the east wall at this location. The basement is constructed of poured concrete. It contains restrooms, furnace room, kitchen and social hall. None of this area is historic space; however, embedded in the wall is a carved date stone from the second church building for the congregation which reads,

METHODIST EPISCOPAL  
CHURCH  
Founded A.D. 1845.

The first floor features steam radiator heat, linoleum floor coverings, and simple woodwork with a top molding. To the rear of the entrance/stair hall there is a centrally located opening which leads to several small rooms that have been added over time and a wide open area which can be blocked off using portable accordion screens. Numerous round steel supports are evident.

Each front staircase contains eleven steps to a landing along the outer walls, before turning to the south. There is a wide turn in the railing and six stairs run up the south wall from either stair to meet on a central or joint landing. On the south wall of the landing there are the three exterior windows. The



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ceiling is level with the start of the arch of the front windows, thus cutting off the top portion, and is lower than that of the sanctuary to the north. There is a simple decorative trim strip around the ceiling.

The north wall of the landing contains a central projecting area flanked by double wooden doors containing four panels with raised centers and applied inner trim. The doors retain their original hardware and white porcelain knobs. On either end of the central projecting section there is a single slightly smaller, paneled door. The one on the west end is a closet and the one on the east contains the steep steps to the attic area.

Throughout the second floor there is 9 1/4" woodwork or surrounds which include a concave inner edge, a wide flat surface, and an applied complex outer trim edge. The sanctuary is a single rectangular room entered through the pair of double doors to the south. There is a painted wainscoting surrounding the room with small plain 2" baseboard or kick board and a simple top rail which serves as window sills for the windows on the east and west walls. There are hardwood floors, probably from the early 20th century, and the aisles are carpeted.

The walls are plaster with a wide, molded plaster cornice or frieze. Two simple circular ceiling medallions mark the original location for two gas lighting fixtures; there are two modern ceiling fans located in the medallions. Six electric lighting ceiling fixtures, which probably date from 1928, are evenly spaced near the east and west walls. All of the door and window openings are topped by cast plaster hoods.

The east and west walls each contain four Neo-Classical stained glass windows (photos #15 and #16) which probably date from the 1903 remodeling, but may be earlier. The windows are broken into three sections, each in a wooden sash, and are made of stained glass in dark green, caramel, lavender, cream, and rust. The bottom section contains a base, the middle section with a religious icon or symbol, and the top section culminates in a shell.

Religious symbols in the windows on the west wall, starting

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from the southwest corner, include: a jeweled crown, a cross, an open Bible, and a dove with an olive branch. The east wall contains from the southeast corner, a palm leaf, a sheaf of wheat, Noah's Ark, and a lily. All the windows match except for the one located in the northeast corner (photo #14) which was given in memory of William F. Stevens and Mary A. Stevens. This window is made up of green, rust, molded green and rust, red and blue stained glass and uses jeweled glass. It contains an oval center medallion with the lily.

The pews and alter of the sanctuary have been changed several times since the buildings original construction. The initial configuration is unknown; in 1903 and 1904, the sanctuary was remodeled to include a raised half circle altar and raised choir loft with serpentine front, rows of curved pews with two off center isles, and stenciling on the walls and ceiling. At this time, the Hook-Hasting organ, located in the center of the north wall, was installed. The current configuration dates from 1958 when a stepped altar and choir loft with a straight front was built across the northern portion of the room and rows of straight pews with a center and side aisles where installed. The earlier communion rail is now installed in the Aurora City Hall. On either side of the organ there are modern doors leading to the rear choir room which was constructed in 1963.

To the left of the organ there is a large round stained glass window which depicts the birth of Christ or a nativity scene. The figural opalescent window contains painted figures and shaded glass which has lighter glass towards the center to draw the viewers attention to the most important portion of the composition. Around the outer edge are the words, "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST / AND ON EARTH PEACE GOODWILL TOWARD MEN". On the right side of the organ there is a large round stained glass window which depicts Jesus and four small children. Written around the outer edge is "Let the Children Come to Me / For to such Belongs the Kingdom of God". The window which is artificially lighted was given in 1985 by the family of Thomas Watts.

The Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church building has changed through the years to show the growing fortunes of the congregation

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and changes in taste for decorating and using religious structures. The exterior and interior of the building, though altered, has retained important elements from each period of its development and continues to be an important and stately structure in downtown Aurora.

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Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church Dearborn County Indiana

## Narrative Statement of Significance

The Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church, today known as the First United Methodist Church of Aurora, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C due to the fact that it is a quality example of mid-19th century Greek Revival ecclesiastic architecture. It is believed that the building was most probably designed and built by a local architect, William Allen. Also important is the church's connection with many prominent individuals and families who were instrumental in Aurora's and southeastern Indiana's growth and development.

The current gable front Greek Revival Methodist Episcopal Church was constructed between 1855 and 1862 at a cost of \$7,828.47. This is the third church building to serve the Aurora Methodist Episcopal congregation, which was established in 1816. Mrs. Olivia Bartholomew, an early settler and wife of one of the congregation's founders, gave the following details concerning Aurora Methodist church buildings to Reverend Charles Tinsley (who served the local congregation from 1867-1869 and 1873-1874) in 1869:

The Methodists helped the Baptists to build their church which stood near or on the same lot as the present one on 5th Street. and for this help the Methodists were to have the use of the Baptist church when not occupied. This arrangement lasted 6 or 8 years.

the first regular church owned by the Methodist of Aurora was a brick 40 feet by 30 feet or thereabouts built almost wholly at the expense of Daniel Bartholomew, one man gave fifty dollars and others gave some labor. This church was commenced in the year [1830] and was rudely enclosed and occupied but remained unfinished until 1838....

The brick work on this first church was executed by Erastus an Nelson Lathrop and stood near the O & M Rail Way Depot, about where, the hoop iron is cut for Gibsons

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Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church Dearborn County Indiana  
shop.

The Second church now standing and known as Siementals Mill on Third St. was built on the corner of Third & Bridge Street in the year 1845.... The third and present church was commenced in 1853.

Mrs. Bartholomew and her husband, David, had come down the Ohio River from Cincinnati on a flat boat in the Spring of 1816. Soon afterwards a two room log structure was built for them and David Bartholomew operated a store out of one of the rooms. It was at their house that the first Methodist sermon was preached by Reverend William Lambden and a class of nine people was first circuit preacher to serve the small group and was possibly the first regular preacher for the congregation.

This portion of Indiana was originally part of the Whitewater Circuit of the Miami District and in 1825 Aurora was placed in the Madison District. From 1844 to 1846 Aurora was part of the Wilmington charge and was in the Rising Sun District. In 1846 it was placed in the Lawrenceburg District and in 1849 Aurora became a station. The second church building was used until approximately 1850 when there was a split in the congregation and the building was lost. The split in the congregation occurred over the doctrine concerning the coming of Christ, which at the time was called "Millerism". However, the congregation soon reunited and it was determined to construct a new church building.

Session Books (1849-1895) for the Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church contain limited information concerning the construction of the church building. The minutes of August 1, 1853 show that a committee was formed to "solicit a donation of a Lot on which to build a Church at the Machine Shops" and on October 29, 1853 there was a motion "to take immediate steps to erect a new church." /as of January 22, 1855 no progress had been made and it was decided to hold a public meeting on January 31, 1855 to discuss the possibility of enlarging and improving the current church building. A committee, including Allen and Morrill, was created to develop cost estimates. On December 17, 1856 lot #96 in the City of Aurora was purchased for \$1,000 by the Trustees of the Church, from George W. and Sally Maria Lane (Dearborn County Deed

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Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church Dearborn County Indiana

Book 12, page 74). However, this transaction was later deemed insufficient and was made null and void. The purchase was again recorded on July 24, 1858 (Dearborn County Deed Book 13, page 510) "and when they shall erect or cause to be erected and built thereon, a house or place of worship for use of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church."

On June 26, 1857 a report on the new church was made by the building committee. A report was presented at the July 15, 1857 meeting concerning the funding of the project. A total of \$6,889.59 had been raised through subscriptions and \$1,000 raised from the sale of the old church building; however, it was felt that the total cost of completing the church and paying off any indebtedness would be \$12,000. so another subscription campaign was launched. The committee also recommended "plastering the upper-part and finishing the floor below and the front door this fall." Apparently nothing happened because the May 2, 1859 minutes tabled a motion "to complete the church building immediately" and plans were discussed to elevate the congregation's indebtedness. The Treasurer reported on July 18, 1859 "The Church Edifice is in good repair. So far as it is finished and is out of Debt, and the title is good for Said property, and the valuation of the same is \$10,000.00 and there is \$5.00 in the Treasury." At this meeting, the finishing of the church was tabled and a subscription plan was adopted. At the November 8, 1859 meeting, "A committee of Five was appointed to ascertain what amount the finishing off of the upper-Room of the church would be" and on February 6, 1860 "Bro. Wm. Allen was added to the Committee appointed to ascertain what amount it would take to finish the church." The matter was again discussed with no resolution at the May 14, 1860 meeting.

The minutes for the April 1, 1861 meeting gives a listing of income and expenses related to the building for the years 1860 and 1861. The largest sum, \$1,176.35, was paid to local architect and builder William Allen. On March 31, 1862 the completion of the church was again discussed. The church was \$400 in debt and it would take an additional \$800 to finish and furnish the church for a total of \$1,200 of "which we hope to be able to raise at the dedication of the house." The building committee was instructed to complete the upper room, so "that it may be ready against the

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time fixed for dedication." Also, John N. Milburn was authorized to borrow "\$100.00 to pay Edward Christie the Bal' due him on plastering of Church." Christie was a local plasterer who worked in Aurora for a number of years and it is believed that he did some plaster work at Hillforest in the 1870s. An ad in the April 17, 1862 Aurora Commercial states:

PLASTERING.  
ED. C. CHRISTIE,  
PLAN AND ORNAMENTAL  
P L A S T E R E R,  
AURORA, IND.

Is prepared to do all work in this line in the finest, cheapest and best manner.

CISTERNs put down to order in short notice.

Christie was born September 19, 1832 in Pennsylvania and died of consumption in Center Township, Dearborn county, Indiana on April 11, 1896.

An account book belonging to Margaret Pitts, Aurora, Indiana from the mid-1850 through the early 1860s lists all subscriptions or pledges made by townspeople towards the construction of the building as well as payments for expenses. The subscription book was kept by William F. Stevens of the Chambers & Stevens Department Store who was treasurer of the construction project. There were a number of payments made to William Allen, a local architect and builder. It is assumed that the Methodist Episcopal Church was designed by him and possibly constructed under his supervision. Allen, himself, made a \$30 pledge towards the building; however, he probably deducted this from his fees, because the account book states following his name, "chrg to acct" (charge to account).

An advertisement in the 1859/60 Aurora City Directory contains an ad for Allen which states that he "will furnish drawings and specifications for Public and Private buildings, special attention given to stair buildings" and "job work of all kinds neatly and promptly executed." The directory states that Allen was located on Second Street between Bridgeway and Mechanic Streets. According to records at Riverview Cemetery, Aurora, Allen was born June 5, 1811 in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, and died

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on March 1, 1878 in Madison City, Alabama, from paralysis caused by a fall. Little other information concerning Allen is known at this time. He does not appear in later city directories for Aurora or the 1885 Dearborn-Ohio Counties history.

It is unknown what other buildings Allen designed and constructed in Aurora, except an addition to the home of Josiah Chambers, who was on the Board of Trustees of the Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church. The June 5, 1862 edition of the Aurora Commercial in a story concerning construction projects in town, stated "Mr. W. F. Stevens is building a tasty and commodious residence for himself, near the corner of Fourth and Judiciary, and Mr. Josiah Chambers is adding another story and an addition to his residence on Fifth street. The plan of this improvement, drawn by Messrs. Allen & Morrill, who are doing the woodwork, evinces great taste and judgement in combining the practical and the beautiful." This house, known locally as the Thompson Dean house, is located at 115 Fifth Street and is site #51222 in the Dearborn County Interim Report. Levi R. Morrill was a carpenter who lived in this same area of Fifth Street and is listed in the 1859/60 city directory.

The June 5, 1862 edition of the Aurora Commercial contained the following description of the dedications,

**Dedication of the M. E. Church.** -- We were not in attendance at the dedication of the M.E. Church in this City, on last Sabbath, But a gentleman who was present reports that it was an occasion of deep interest. The sermon of Bishop [E.R.] Ames was elaborate and ponderous. The large and splendid room was crowded with the talent, wealth, elite and fashion of the city and vicinity. Their presence reminded one of the place where "languid beauty held her pale faced court."

At the close of the sermon, one thousand dollars was subscribed towards paying the debt on the church and parsonage. Among the largest donors were some of those liberal gentleman who have contributed largely to those improvements of our city which have made it one of the ornaments of the State, and a place noted for its



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enterprise, liberality and industry. Long may peace, prosperity and happiness be their lot.

Reverend William G. Ransdell wrote in his annual report on June 16, 1862, "The Churches success in completing their new place of worship, and in raising funds to discharge their indebtedness, affords proper occasion for warm congratulations. You have now the means of completing one of the best churches within the bounds of this annual conference."

The church was repainted in 1880 "with the brick work receiving two coats and the cupola three. Pastor E. H. Wood wrote on September 22, 1885 that during the previous year "the audience room of the church has been thoroughly renovated. Windows changed to modern style and replaced with stained glass. The ceiling and walls frescoed, and two beautiful chandeliers purchased. A slate roof put on and exterior painted red and penciled. The entire improvements costing some \$1800." The Sunday School rooms were added to rear of the building between 1885 and 1888.

Cochran, today a portion of Aurora, was an independent town during the 19th century. The Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church served this population and, in September 1888, Rev. E. A. Campbell stated the church membership had jumped from 349 to 500 and one of the reasons is the number of members from Cochran; "the Cochran class greatly needs a small chapel built on their lot in Cochran for the purpose of class & Prayer meetings, and an M. E. S[unday] School, so well as for preaching occasionally." However, the following year Campbell reported, "This Conference year 1888-1889 was rather remarkable for the church holding its own under discouraging circumstances. The Large Rolling Mills, Nail Mills and Car Shops located in Cochran, each was removed from Aurora. Taking with them many laborers with their families. The car shops especially took many members of the M. E. Church and large numbers from our S[unday] School." The Mississippi & Ohio Railroad, later the Baltimore & Ohio, moved their train repair shops to Washington, Indiana at this time.

The Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church has been under the leadership of many different ministers since its founding in 1816.

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Most have stayed for only a year or two before moving on to the next church. One of the most notable of these ministers was Rev. Judge A. J. Cotton who wrote Cotton's Keepsake (1858) in which he describes the town, the surrounding area, and many of the town's residents. The Aurora congregation, like others throughout southeastern Indiana, helped to support Moore's Hill Male and Female collegiate Institute, the Methodist college at Moores Hill, Indiana. One of the Aurora members, Will Stevens, funded the gymnasium there soon after the turn of the century.

The round stained glass window located in the northwest corner, was given, according to one church history, in 1888 by Mrs. James A. Gibson at a cost of \$1000 in memory of James Wymond, Adaline Wymond, Richmond Wymond, and John A. Wymond. It is more likely that the window was given by Jane Wymond (Mrs. William E.) Gibson, in memory of her father, mother, and two brothers. The round window to balance this one was installed in the northeast corner and to the right of the pulpit in 1985. It was donated by the Thomas Watts family.

James O. Durbin wrote in the official church history book on October 16, 1905, that the pipe organ was given on July 4th, 1903 by Mrs. Margaret E. Wymond of Louisville, Kentucky in memory of her husband, Mr. W. S. Wymond, son of the late Philip Wymond. The pipe organ, which cost \$2,500, is opus 2,012 and was built by the Hook-Hasting Company of Boston, Massachusetts, earlier known as Hook and E. & C.G. Hook. The Hook-Hasting Company originated in 1829 and survived until 1936 when the company went out of tracker business because of the Depression. The organ is of the tracker style and is entirely mechanical from keyboard to pipes. It has nineteen registers (stops which open and shut ranks or sets of pipes) and seven hundred pipes. Originally its bellows were powered by a water pump, but now its air source is an electric blower. The organ can also be pumped by hand, and one stop on the organ is a "Bellows Signal" which could inform the pumper that air is needed.

This gift by Mrs. Wymond encouraged others to give more generously for the renovation of the church building and the work was completed without putting the congregation into debt. At that time, \$3,800 worth of repairs were made which included, "a new

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floor for the Sunday School room and the repapering of same; beautiful carpets; elegant new windows, a new choir loft, a new front of imitation stone work and the repainting of the outside of the church, a new cement walk in front of the church and other smaller repairs which left our church in a condition of which our people were justly proud especially as all the work was paid for and we owe not one dollar on our Church."

In 1915, the sanctuary was closed for three weeks for cleaning and redecorating. During the Great Flood of 1937, the waters of the Ohio River reached the second floor sanctuary. In 1938, the original wooden steeple was removed because of structural concerns and the potential hazard to the church building and surrounding properties. In 1951, a new steeple fabricated in Lawrenceburg of steel and cooper was installed. This new steeple does not match the original; it is one section shorted now.

Between the years of 1953 and 1957 the congregation spent nearly \$70,000 on repairs and renovations. Architect Robert E. Isaacs of Grunkemeyer and Sullivan and Associates, Cincinnati, Ohio, developed specifications for the remodeling of the first floor, excavation of the basement, and exterior repairs. The floor of the rear Sunday School room was raised two and a half feet to the level of the first floor; the recreation hall, kitchen, and other basement rooms were created at this time. Moveable partitions were added on the first floor and new colored glass windows were installed.

In 1958, alterations were made to the sanctuary, including changing the altar and the choir loft area. The late 19th or early 20th century choir loft railing was removed and placed in the City Council Chamber of the 1887 Aurora City Hall located down the street. At this time, the organ was completely dismantled, cleaned and rebuilt. Also, the rows of curved pews were replaced with straight rows and the aisle configuration changed from two angled side aisles to a central aisle. The sanctuary was redecorated in 1989 at a cost of \$16,000 and in 1992 the exterior of the building was repaired and painted at a cost of \$26,000, plus a new \$4,000 roof was installed.

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Nationally, the Methodist church has gone through several name changes because of separations and mergers within the church. Such separations occurred in 1828 over the issue of lay representation and again in 1844 over the issue of slavery. Several Methodist branches merged in 1939 to form the official Methodist Church and in 1969 the Methodists and the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged to form the United Methodist Church. All of these changes have effected the local Aurora congregation. It, like many other Ohio River Valley Methodist congregations, has put significant energies and funds into the upkeep of its facilities. Lawrenceburg, the county seat up river, built the handsome Hamiline Chapel in 1847, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, and the downriver city of Rising Sun constructed their massive church in 1865. All three are in the Greek Revival style. Numerous smaller Methodist churches are located throughout the county.

The Aurora Methodist Episcopal Church, also known as the First United Methodist Church of Aurora, is a dominate religious structure in the downtown Aurora historic district. It has served generations of southeastern Indiana citizens and it is important to the area's history. This Greek Revival building has been altered numerous times; however, the changes have added details to the building rather than removing important elements.

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Verbal Boundary Description

In-lot number 96, City of Aurora

Boundary Justification

This is the historic property boundary.

