

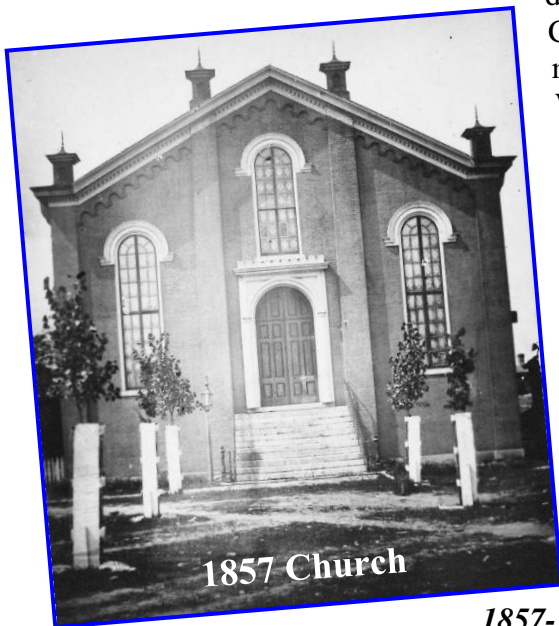
History – Centenary United Methodist Church, Shelbyville, KY

As Centenary United Methodists of Shelbyville, we believe: ***“We exist: To Love God. Love People. Make Disciples”***. Our mission grew from our rich heritage dating back to the birth of the community we call home, Shelbyville and Shelby County, KY.

Methodists were among the first settlers of Shelby County.

1795-1800: Despite the hardships of pioneers facing an unsettled, often dangerous land, early Methodists, gathering in their cabin homes, started organizing as congregations. The Shelby Circuit was formed, and pastors were being assigned to preach in the county by 1796.

1804-1857: Methodist families settling north of Shelbyville built in 1804 the first brick Methodist Church – not only in the county but in the state; it was also the second brick structure built in KY for any denomination. Some residents with membership in the Brick Chapel organized as a society in Shelbyville as early as 1809; meeting in a log cabin described as near the “Public Square”. When in 1814 those Methodists built their first church in Shelbyville, it was the first structure of any religious sect in town. *“The Shelbyville Meeting House”*, appropriately named since the Methodists allowed the other Protestants then in town: Baptists and Presbyterians, to hold their worship services there, too. The approximate location of the brick church was what is now 411 and 419 Washington Street. Shelbyville Methodists were served by some of Kentucky’s most illustrious preachers including Hubbard H. Kavanaugh (1844-1845). Kavanaugh who would later become a bishop led the Methodist Church through the critical controversy over slavery which resulted in the church joining other congregations across the South identified as Methodist Episcopal Church, South.



1857-1897: When a larger structure was necessary the old *“Meeting House”* was sold for \$500 to the Rev. John Tevis, a former pastor and co-educator with his wife, Julia Ann Hieronymus Tevis, founder of Science Hill School. It was razed in 1859 and the Tevises used the brick in building the north wing of Science Hill School (today part of the Wakefield-Scarce Galleries). In 1856 the Methodists purchased a lot (which is the present church site) for \$2,120 from the Tevis family. The church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, was completed and dedicated on October 4, 1857. As part of the dedication, a collection taken to pay toward the indebtedness, surprised members and visitors when they learned it totaled \$3,818 - more than enough to retire the full debt. In 1894, less than 40 years later, the church membership had more than doubled to about 250. Rather than move, the Methodists voted to raze the building (then valued at \$10,000) and began in January 1897 to construct a more modern facility on the same site.

1897-1978: By the time the cornerstone was laid June 4, 1897, the congregation had decided to adopt the name “Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church South” to commemorate the first century of the Shelby Circuit (1796-1896). At a cost of \$15,000, the structure was completed and dedicated December 12, 1897.

Approximately 65 years later, membership had grown to 504, necessitating an educational annex which was built and completed in 1961. In 1977 - 78, Centenary invested \$80,000 to completely restore their main structure and sanctuary. Approximately 3:30 a.m., on December 28, 1978, a break-in to the church escalated to arson and over a five-hour span, despite valiant efforts by firemen, alerted members were left helplessly watching their beloved church burn to destruction including the beautiful stained-glass windows. Extensive smoke damage was all that the educational annex suffered. Miraculously, the brick walls of the original building withstood the devastating fire; leaving a shell of the once beautiful structure. Prayerfully members vowed to rebuild within those smoldering walls.



Following the fire, only the frame of the Cross & Crown Window remained.

1978-1982: Although the fire rendered their facility unusable, the Methodists never failed to gather for Sunday worship or Wednesday night fellowship. The first Sunday following the fire members and friends of Centenary met to worship in the Circuit Courtroom of the Shelby County Courthouse. Just a few feet outside the window Centenary's steeple beams were still smoldering in the winter air. In the months ahead, the Methodists worshiped in the then West Middle School, (now the Board of Education) on West Main while the Presbyterians hosted the Wednesday fellowship services. Rebuilding Centenary became a cause for the entire community. Not only did other Methodist churches in the county and state join in the effort, donations came from other denominations, civic organizations, county and city government. Members are indebted to a countless number who hosted and supported our chili suppers, yard sales and countless other fund raisers and to our faithful committee responsible for the rebuilding project. In 1979 Centenary purchased the four adjoining lots on the northeast side for parking space and future expansion.

1982-present: With all the support Centenary had from the community and throughout the state it was no surprise when so many visitors joined the Methodists to consecrate Centenary's new home on October 24, 1982; an estimated 600 people filled the sanctuary. Many gasped in awe to see that the two largest stained-glass windows had been restored. The renovated church building was dedicated on December 29, 1985, following the note burning ceremony - a fire the congregation could appreciate; the retired investment, approximately \$1.5 million. In 1993 the church purchased the office building that shared the county square and in 2000 the adjoining buildings were added to the church campus. The buildings which had been condemned by the city and could not be rehabilitated were removed in 2001 for temporary parking while future expansion options are considered. Today Centenary has two Sunday worship services - contemporary and traditional - active Sunday School and other small group ministries; exciting children and youth programming; local and beyond service ministries. We are living our Core Values as we work to fulfill the vision God has given us: ***"To be changed by Christ, to love and serve in the streets of Shelbyville and beyond."***

A compilation of information researched, compiled and contributed by Betty Ann Bowles, Bonnie Burks Gray, Duanne Puckett and the late Ted Igleheart.