

Centennial Publication

First Baptist Church

Elizabeth, New Jersey



100th Anniversary
1843-1943

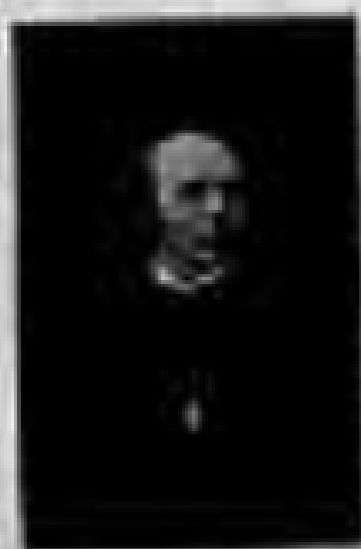


*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us
go into the house of the Lord—PSALMS 122:1.*

Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1847-1867
 Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1867-1887
 Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1887-1907
 Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1907-1927
 Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1927-1947
 Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1947-1967



Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1847-1867



Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1867-1887



Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1887-1907



Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1907-1927



Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1927-1947



Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1947-1967



Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1967-1987

PASTORS, FIRST BAPTIST CHUR



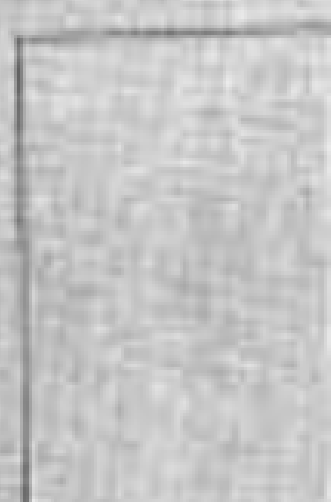
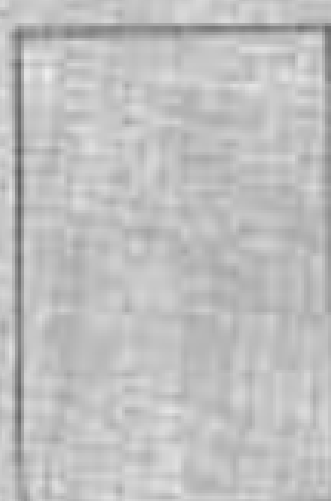
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Rev. Samuel D. ...
 1887-1907



Preface



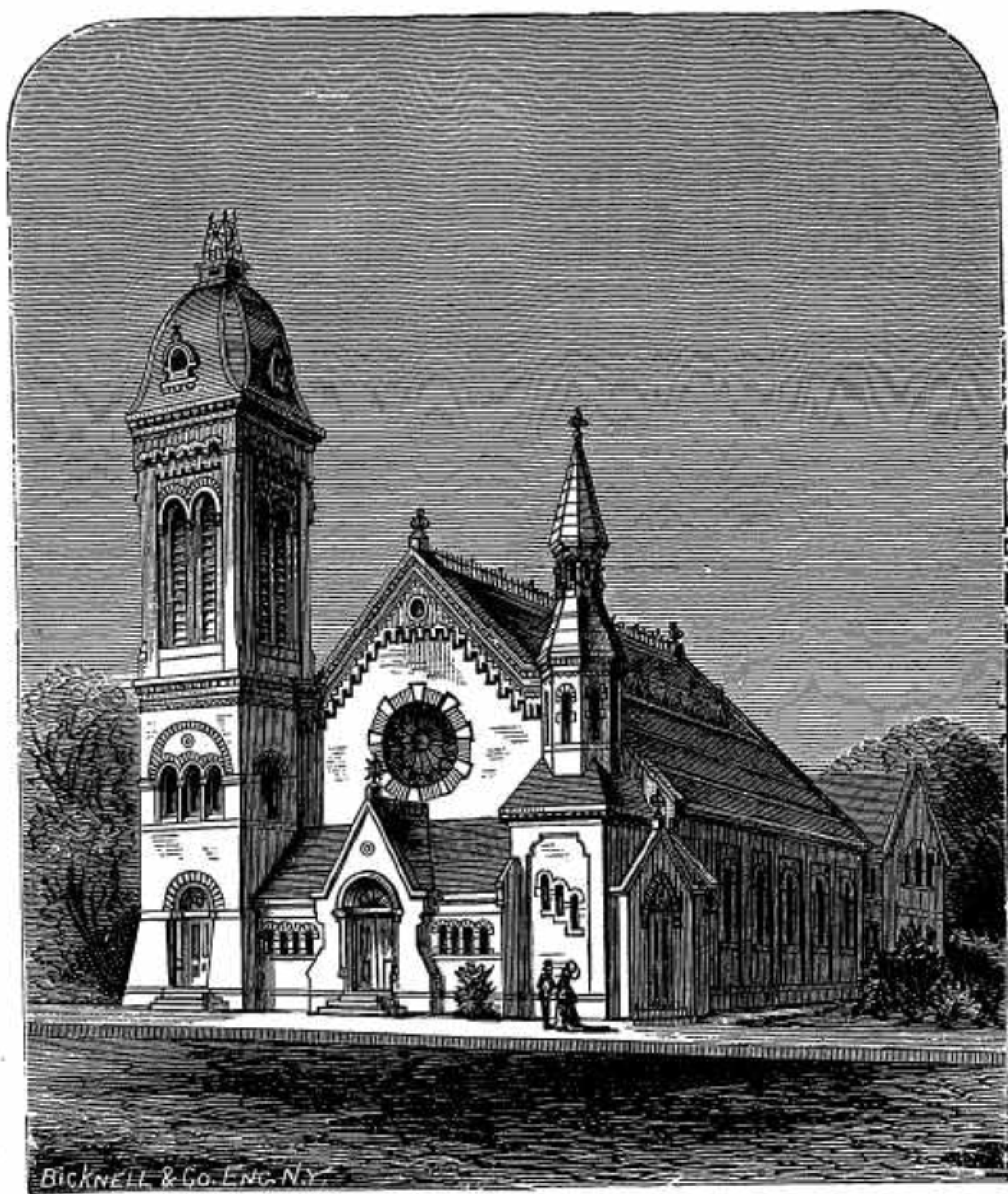
AS WE OBSERVE the Centennial Anniversary of the founding of our Church we are reminded anew that others have labored and we have been blessed by the fruit of their labors. In grateful appreciation we remember the many loyal Christians who by their faith, prayer, service and material gifts, have carried on the Lord's work during the past century. We are glad that we can pause to pay tribute to them at the close of this first century of our life as a Church. They met the tasks of their day with courage and faith and at the price of consecrated, sacrificial service, held high the banner of Jesus Christ. Let us follow their example and in this day of world disaster and confusion may we be like a beacon light upon a hill directing men to Him who is the light of the world.

We have curtailed our celebration of this happy occasion in keeping with the demands of the time in which we live. We are deeply appreciative of those who have contributed in any way to make our modest celebration a success. Especially to the outstanding Church leaders and former pastors of this Church who have shared in our celebration do we express our sincere thanks. It is our hope that this little book will help you to preserve the pleasant memories of this occasion.

It has been my happy privilege to be your pastor for a little over eleven years. We have labored together through the trying years of the depression and have had the joy of seeing our beloved Church strengthened spiritually and materially so that we can say with confidence that the future never held greater promise if we are willing to accept its challenge.

Remembering those who have gone before us, let us with confidence and renewed consecration enter upon this second century of our Church life looking unto Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith.

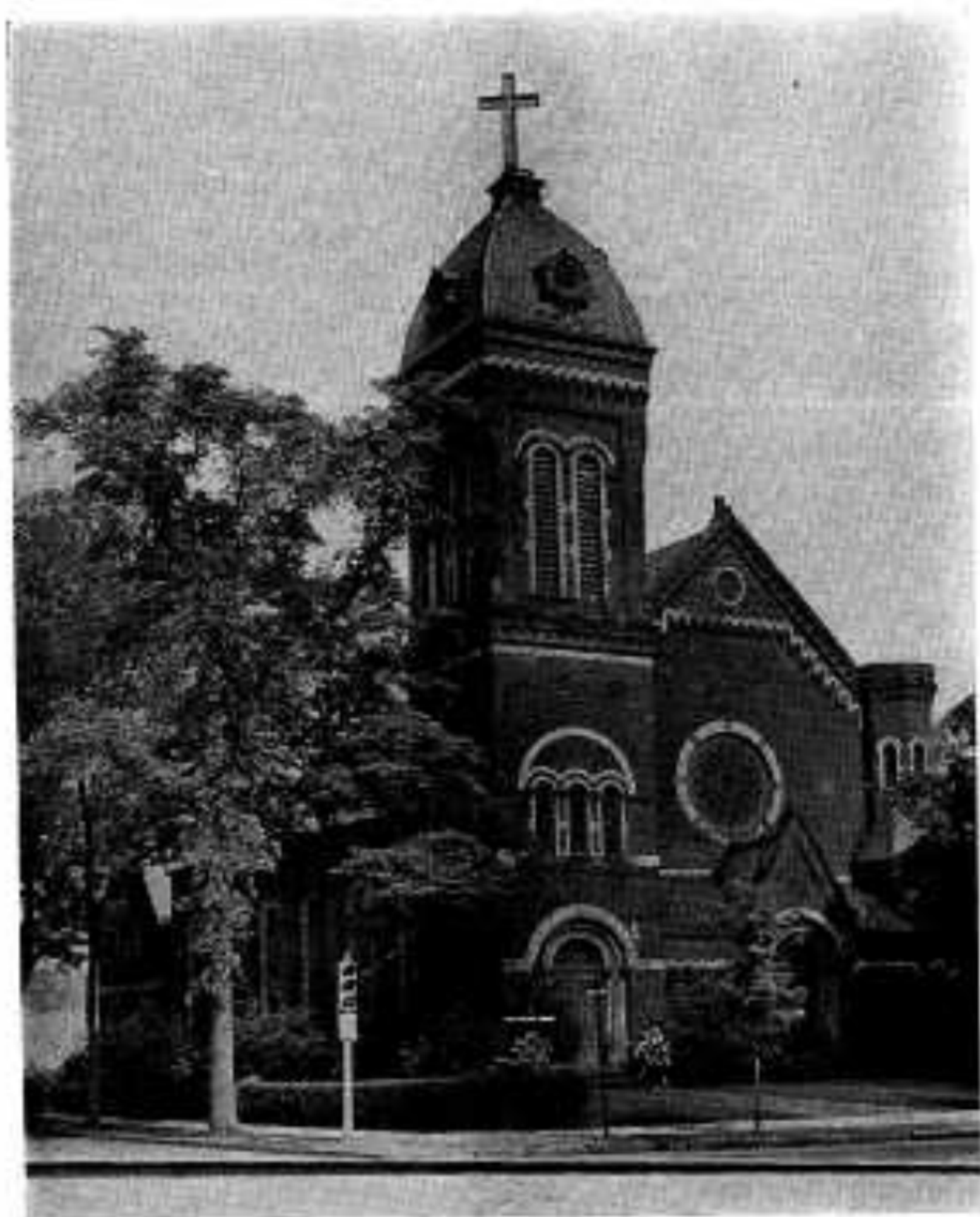
ARTHUR H. RYAN, *Pastor.*



THE PRESENT CHURCH AS DEDICATED IN 1872



REV. ARTHUR HULBURT RYAN



THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH 1943

History of Our Church

Compiled by MISS CHARLOTTE A. A. CORBET AND MRS. MAY GLASSON

IN THE early years of Elizabeth's history Baptists, as a denomination, seem to have taken no root in the city. In the year 1842, Mr. Elkanah Drake, of Mount Bethel, N. J., a man of strong Baptist principles, moved to this place, and at once bestirred himself to collect such followers of his own faith as he could locate. He established a meeting in the Select School on Union Street, the first congregation consisting of about seven or eight persons who listened to a sermon delivered by Rev. John Wivell, pastor of the Scotch Plains Baptist Church. The Rev. J. T. Seely of Staten Island was engaged to hold a series of meetings, which continued for three weeks and which did much toward cementing the Baptist strength of the town and vicinity.

On June 5th, 1843, a council from Baptist churches in New Jersey and Staten Island met in the Select School and recognized as a gospel church the First Baptist Church of Elizabeth. There were fifteen constituent members, who brought letters from Baptist churches at Rahway, Mount Bethel and Scotch Plains. These were: Elkanah Drake, Sarah Drake, David S. Higgins, Margaret Higgins, Martha Williams, Caleb Jeffrey, Julia Jeffrey, Rachel Ketchum, Elizabeth Faitoute, Rebecca Higgins, John W. Boyleston, Catherine Boyleston, Isaac Ball, Sarah Ball and Mary E. M. Ball. The first officers were: David S. Higgins, deacon, and Elkanah Drake, treasurer and clerk.

The Church purchased the Select School building and at once proceeded to convert it into a house of worship. It was dedicated November 10th, 1843, and the dedication sermon preached by Rev. Spencer H. Cone, D.D. This building was used as the church edifice for fourteen years.

On September 20th, 1843, Rev. Charles Cox was called to be the first pastor and began his labors in January, 1844. The first baptisms took place Sabbath morning, January 28th, 1844, on the west side of Elizabethtown Creek, just below Lowden Street. This ordinance was witnessed by many who saw for the first time a scriptural baptism.

Mr. Cox's ministry closed after about fifteen months' service. He was followed by Rev. Edward Conover, Rev. E. Tibbals and Rev. W. H. Turner, each of whom served about a year. In February, 1848, the Rev. J. H. Waterbury assumed the duties of pastor, and under his earnest and faithful guidance the little church began to take heart, and plan bigger things for God and the truth. Property was bought on West Jersey Street, behind the present R. J. Goerke department store, for the purpose of erecting a more suitable place of worship. Ill health, however, compelled Mr. Waterbury's resignation in 1855, and the building project was abandoned for the time.

The next pastor was Rev. T. S. Rogers, who served the Church for two years, April, 1855, to April, 1857. These were very difficult years for the Church and the financial burden was very heavy. Soon after Mr. Rogers' resignation, Rev. L. N. Hill accepted a call to the pas-

torate, beginning his ministry in June, 1857. In the two years of his labors, interest was greatly revived, and a lecture-room was built on the Jersey Street property at a cost of \$3,800. This house was dedicated September 28th, 1858, the sermon being delivered by Rev. Rufus Babcock, D.D., of Paterson, Rev. N. Murray, D.D., and Rev. David Magie, D.D., assisting.



WEST JERSEY STREET CHURCH BUILDING DEDICATED IN 1858

In June, 1859, Rev. George W. Clark was called to become pastor, which office he filled faithfully for almost eight years. Under his wise leadership the Church increased in numbers and in efficiency, a plan for systematic benevolence was inaugurated for the first time, a debt of \$2,700 was paid, and the Church thus enabled to enter more fully into spiritual work. A total of 209 new members was acquired in these eight years. In 1867, Mr. Clark resigned and was succeeded the following year by Rev. Theodore A. K. Gessler.

Doctor Gessler brought to his work youthful vigor and consecrated talent, and, finding a band of workers, well trained by Doctor Clark, he went forward expecting and attempting great things. It soon became apparent that a larger edifice was needed if the Church would realize its highest efficiency and to the securing of this both pastor and people addressed themselves. The property on Jersey Street was sold and the present property at the corner of Union Avenue and Prince Street acquired. The building now occupied was erected, the total cost including lot amounting to about \$64,000. Of this nearly \$30,000 was unprovided for, and in time became a heavy burden. The dedicatory services were held January 3rd, 1872, the Reverend Doctors H. M. Gallagher and P. S. Henson delivering the sermons, the pastor offering the prayer.

In the following years the Church was greatly blessed. The Spirit of God was wonderfully manifested, and many were added to the

Church. During his ministry 303 persons were received into membership. In December, 1879, much to the regret of his people, Dr. Gessler resigned, and was succeeded in February, 1880, by Rev. J. C. Allen.

During the years of Mr. Allen's pastorate the Church prospered greatly. Benevolences were largely increased, the work in the Bible School, in the Young People's Union and the Women's Societies flourished, a spirit of harmony prevailed, and many were converted. In all 202 were added to the Church roll. Moreover, the entire debt of \$45,000 was raised, much to the joy and relief of both pastor and people, and the First Baptist Church has since entertained a feeling of the deepest gratitude to Mr. Allen for his arduous work which resulted in the lifting of this heavy burden.

In 1885 the Church reluctantly parted with Mr. Allen, and unanimously chose Rev. Carter Helm Jones to be his successor. Mr. Jones quickly won the hearts of the people, and so great was his popularity in the community that the capacity of the auditorium was frequently taxed to the utmost to accommodate the crowds that flocked to hear his discourses. Conversions were frequent, and during his short ministry the Church attained its highest membership to that time, reaching a total of 398. In April, 1889, Mr. Jones resigned to accept the call of the First Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tenn.

The next pastor was the Rev. W. H. Shermer, who worked with the Church from February, 1890, to April, 1893. Mr. Shermer was a profound Bible student and faithfully preached the Word. During his pastorate, the Mills evangelistic meetings were conducted in the city, and many were received into the fellowship of the Church.

After the resignation of Mr. Shermer the Church worked under more or less disadvantage during a pastorless year; but in the spring of 1894 extended to Rev. William E. Staub a unanimous call to its pastorate. Under the energetic leadership of the new pastor, a man filled with the Spirit and with zeal, the work which had lagged was soon revived. The Women's Missionary and Aid Societies took on new activity, a Christian Endeavor Society was organized, soon followed by a Junior Society, the Bible School took on new life with the introduction of the graded system, and a large and promising Baraca Class for men was organized. It was a time of renewed effort and accomplishment and of spiritual awakening. Many were converted and still many more were constrained to strive for a deeper consecration. About 130 new members were received.

In May, 1902, Dr. Staub resigned to return to Philadelphia, and after practically another year without a pastor, the call to Rev. Travers B. Thames, D.D., was accepted. Doctor Thames began his ministry to us in February, 1903. His was a kindly, genial spirit, and he soon loved his way into the hearts of his flock. His pastorate was noticeably one of harmony and peace. The preaching was such as it is the fortune of but few churches to enjoy continuously. Doctor Thames worked especially well with the young people of the Church, and ably conducted the Bible School in the latter years of his pastorate. In the summer of 1911 Doctor Thames resigned to accept a call to Newman, Ga.

The pastorate of Rev. Newton M. Simmonds began in January, 1912. Mr. Simmonds was particularly interested in the young people and right from the beginning of his work urged the older members to take more interest in the youth. He was greatly esteemed not only among Baptists, but by other denominations as well. During his pastorate the relations between the pastor and Church were most cordial. It was during his pastorate that we celebrated the seventieth anniversary in October, 1918. A week of special services marked the event.

On March 4, 1919, tribute was paid to the memory of nine deacons who had passed on in the last forty years. In their memory the beautiful tablet which now hangs in the front of the church edifice was unveiled. Of these men Mr. Simmonds said, "These men, although dead, yet speak and their works do follow them. And even though they themselves are not here, they live on in the hearts of all who knew them."

Many of the church boys left to do service for their country in the first World War during his pastorate. Mr. Simmonds terminated his pastorate in February, 1922. His deep friendship, his kindness and his religious guidance will never be forgotten by all those who worked with him.

After the resignation of Mr. Simmonds, the Church was without a regular pastor for a period of two years. During this time Dr. Robert Pierce served as interim pastor. He had a most gracious and pleasing personality and presented God's message so convincingly that our people received an inspiration for a steadfast and closer walk with God.

While Dr. Pierce was still with us a Forward Movement Program was planned. This movement was to aid in the building up of the Church, both in membership and finances. It was at this time the Church voted to authorize the trustees to mortgage the Church for a sum not to exceed \$25,000. The money to be used for necessary repairs and to provide for an enlarged program for at least two years. It was hoped that under this plan the membership would increase sufficiently to carry the program and pay off the mortgage. The Church prayerfully asked for God's guidance in selecting a leader for this work.

Rev. Llewellyn Brown was called to the pastorate and began his work April 2, 1924. The present parsonage was purchased at this time. The Church progressed quite rapidly in membership for about four years. The financial burden grew heavier, however, and with the coming of the depression proved more than the Church could bear. It was during Mr. Brown's pastorate that the cross was placed on the steeple of the church. Mr. Brown terminated his pastorate in July, 1931.

The pastorate of Rev. Arthur H. Ryan began January 10, 1932. He has been carrying on God's work with great Christian zeal for over eleven years. A fine spirit exists between Mr. Ryan and his fellow workers in the Church because of his great kindness, thoughtfulness, and sympathy in time of need. He is ever ready to lend a helping hand. A disastrous fire occurred in the Church Saturday afternoon, November 26, 1938, destroying the beautiful organ and seriously damaging the interior of the Church. The insurance covered the damage and the fine zeal of our men in helping with the repairs made it pos-

sible to make many improvements, such as the rebuilding of our pews, the changing of the front of our Church, and a new steam heating system. We feel that our Church is more beautiful today than it was before the fire. The physical equipment of our Church is in excellent condition. The indebtedness of the Church has been reduced approximately \$10,000 during Mr. Ryan's pastorate and the membership strengthened. The present membership is 439. Forty-nine men and one woman have entered the service of our country. The spiritual and financial condition of the Church at the present time is good. The history of our Church will still go on. Even though at the present time everything looks so dark in the world about us, let us face all issues fearlessly and with strong, sincere faith, relying on the promises of God, aggressively carry on the work of His Kingdom. With Mr. Ryan as our faithful leader, we can and will look unto the future with optimism, with the full assurance that all our efforts, no matter how difficult they may seem at times, will be crowned with success. So—Onward Christian Soldiers!

OUR COVENANT

As we trust we have received, through Divine Grace, the Lord Jesus Christ, and given ourselves wholly to him, and on profession of our faith have been buried with him in baptism and thus united to his church, we do now solemnly and joyfully covenant with each other, and, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, engage—

That we will walk together with brotherly love, exercising a Christian care and watchfulness over each other, participating in each other's joys, and with tender sympathy, bearing one another's burdens and sorrows.

That we will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together at the communion and other appointed meetings, but seek and pray for the spirituality, harmony, and prosperity of this church; sustain its worship, ordinances, disciplines and doctrines, and give its claims a sacred pre-eminence over all organizations of human origin.

That we will cheerfully contribute of our means, as God has prospered us, for the support of a faithful and evangelical ministry among us; for the relief of the poor; and for spreading the gospel over the earth.

That we will maintain private and family devotions; religiously educate the children committed to our care; and endeavor, in purity of heart and newness of life, to exemplify and commend our holy faith; to win souls to Christ, and to hold fast our profession until he shall come to receive us unto himself.
