

## A Brief History of Boone Memorial Presbyterian Church

In the fall of 1885, just two years after the town of Caldwell was founded, five women of this pioneer village met to discuss plans for raising money to build a Presbyterian Church. It looked like a stupendous effort in a town of only a few hundred people to attempt to build a church and pay for it when money was scarce. This hardy band sponsored musical evenings and public entertainments; they sold patchwork quilts and home canned foods; they provided meals for the hard-working men of the growing town. After two years, the ladies had accumulated about five hundred dollars, which was enough to start a church.

The sides were erected and the roof put on but before the windows or doors could be installed or the interior finished, the ladies ran out of money. With their church boarded up and a new drive for money underway, the undaunted group decided a shepherd was needed if there was ever to be a flock to occupy the pews. It was on their invitation that the Rev. William Judson Boone and his new bride, Annie, came to Caldwell.

With Dr. Boone's arrival an organizational meeting was held on February 15, 1888. The original building was finished and dedicated on April 19, 1890. Dr. Boone went on to become the first President of the Presbyterian-affiliated College of Idaho in Caldwell.

In *Big Trouble* by J. Anthony Lukas (an account of the assassination of ex-Governor Frank Steunenberg), references were made to the Presbyterian Church: "Like many other Idaho communities of that era, Caldwell was sharply divided between a 'saloon' crowd and a 'church' faction. The saloon crowd - heavily male - favored an 'open town,' allowing alcohol to be served at pastimes of such places. The real foot soldiers in the church movement were the town's formidable women, many of them members of the WCTU and the Presbyterian Church." In another reference, Lucas commented: "The community's general air of well-being was reflected in the bustling jollity of Caldwell's holiday festivities, formally ushered in on Saturday, Dec. 23, with the Christmas exercises in three downtown churches. The most impressive were those at the Presbyterian Church, the house of worship that attracted many of Caldwell's leading citizens."

A new church building, designed by the Boise architectural firm Wayland and Fennel, was completed at the corner of Fourteenth and Dearborn streets in 1948. The first worship service was held on Easter Sunday of that year. While the new building was being constructed, the congregation held services at the College of Idaho. The church's congregation grew rapidly over the next thirteen years, and the Westminster Center's construction was completed in 1961.

As experienced by other churches in the 21st century, a schism developed in Boone church's congregation during 2012 over whether to stay with the established Presbyterian Church/USA after some of its policies were voted on and changed. The congregation split over the issue after the church leadership decided to leave the PC/USA and join the Evangelical Presbyterian Church organization. Those members who wished to stay with the PC/USA were forced to find another place to worship while the Boise Presbytery pursued litigation over Boone Church's property ownership. These "loyalists" met at the College of Idaho from Easter of 2013 to October of 2016. After mandated legal mediation, the Boise Presbytery gained back ownership of Boone Memorial Presbyterian church property, and the members who supported the PC/USA worshipped in their home sanctuary on October 16, 2016. The congregation continue to focus on growing its membership to serve the larger Caldwell community.