RAMSEY COUNTY
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Primitive Simplicity and Great Truths:
Peoples Church, the Reverend Samuel G. Smith, and St. Paul

Philip J. Ramstad

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The monument for the Francis family in Greenwood Cemetery, Nashville, Tennessee. In the left foreground is the grave marker for William T. (1870–1929) and on the right is the marker for Nellie G. (1874–1969). Photo by Robert Orr Jr.

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RAMSEY COUNTY

History

Volume 51, Number 4 Winter 2017

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON JANUARY 25, 2016:

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Ramsey County history has yielded some fascinating lives, and in this issue Paul Nelson looks closely at one: William T. Francis. Francis, a pioneering African American lawyer, had a successful career in St. Paul before he departed as consul to Liberia in 1927. While there, he investigated conditions of forced labor before he died tragically of yellow fever. His wife, Nellie, once spoke at the Peoples Church, a monumental landmark near the Cathedral of St. Paul that is now gone, is the focus of another article here. Philip J. Ramstad traces the history of that congregation, which welcomed other speakers as well-known as Mark Twain and Winston Churchill. On the other side of the city, the former Willys-Overland building at present-day Highway 280 and University Avenue housed a massive training program for the army's air service mechanics during World War I. Roger Bergerson details the operation that taught 3,000 students before it shut down after the Armistice. Finally, as a reminder, because RCHS has now moved to a different fiscal year, its Annual Report will be included in the upcoming Summer 2017 issue.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

Primitive Simplicity and Great Truths:

Peoples Church, the Reverend Samuel G. Smith, and St. Paul

Philip J. Ramstad

Easter came early in 1940, on March 24th, and it was a cold and difficult one in St. Paul. Two days earlier, on Good Friday, the city's firefighters fought blazes in two downtown church buildings. The fire at Central Park Methodist Church happened during the Good Friday worship service itself and drove 500 people into the afternoon chill. But the damage was modest compared to the fire that destroyed the Catholic archdiocese's education center just down the hill from the Cathedral of St. Paul. The archdiocese had purchased the building just a few months earlier from the church that built it and whose name nearly everyone in the city still used. The banner headline across the evening *St. Paul Dispatch* said it: "Former Peoples Church Burns."[1]

Fire destroyed much of the first Peoples Church building at 235 Pleasant Avenue in St. Paul in 1902. Photo by A. Irber. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

For 50 years, the Peoples Church graced the northwest corner of Pleasant Avenue and Chestnut Street, a few hundred yards down the slope from the Cathedral. So much about the church was different, from how it started to what it did for the city to how it looked. Central Park Methodist had a steeple that was 165 feet high. Central Presbyterian Church and the First Baptist Church of St. Paul, also built in the 1880s, also had tall spires. The Peoples Church had no steeple, just mammoth size.

When the church was built in 1889, it was thought to be the largest Protestant church building in the country. Its sanctuary, which could seat 1,800 people and was said to have perfect acoustics, was the largest auditorium in the city for many years. The building resembled, as architectural historian Larry Millett wrote, "a large clubhouse more than a place of worship."[2] One writer of the day thought the church exhibited the "wild, free theology of the West."[3]

Peoples Church from its beginning endeavored to be more than an institution of and for its members. It became, as the *Minneapolis Star Journal* said in its report about the fire that destroyed the building, "the landmark of cultural life in St. Paul."[4] Mark Twain, Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois and General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, were among the many notable people who lectured from its pulpit. Serge Rachmaninoff played piano there in 1925. Violinist Fritz Kreisler, soprano Kirsten Flagstad, cellist Gregor Piatagorski, and baritone Lawrence Tibbett were among the performers my family heard in the 1930s.

As a child in the 1930s in St. Paul, I walked into that auditorium every Sunday with my family. It left an impression that I've never forgotten. The windows and artwork on every side were "silent sermons." Most of the stained glass windows told stories of the Christian faith, but others depicted leaders of major religions of the world and figures from the sciences and arts. Most memorable for me was a statue at the back of the sanctuary, a colossal copy of the most famous work of the early nineteenth-century Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. Called *Christus,* it depicted Jesus Christ with outstretched arms and is known informally as the Appealing Christ. The original, created in 1821, is in the Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen. The version at Peoples Church stood over seven feet tall and was made of Italian marble, a memorial to the mother of a church member. Inscribed at its base were the words, "Come unto me."[5]

The Founding of the Church

The church was started in 1888 by a group of Methodist men and women who wanted to keep their minister in St. Paul. The minister they cared so much about, the Reverend Dr. Samuel G. Smith, was a British-born preacher's son who came to the United States with his family at the age of six. He grew up in Iowa and began his career as a teacher and school superintendent.

By the 1880s, when he was in his late twenties and early thirties, Smith had developed a national reputation preaching on the Chautauqua circuit. In 1884, when he was taken ill after a particularly challenging tour of Chautauqua sites around the Midwest, the news spread beyond the St. Paul newspapers to others around the

Following the 1902 fire, the congregation rebuilt the church. This is how Peoples Church looked in 1915. Photo by Charles P. Gibson. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

country, including *The New York Times.* "Physicians say he must give himself absolute rest for at least two months," the dispatch in the *Times* reported. "This misfortune comes at a time when Dr. Smith had received three near simultaneous calls to large churches—two in the East and one in the West."[6]

Toward the end of 1887, the pressure on Smith to move was coming from the Methodist hierarchy, which believed in moving ministers around to create opportunities and keep authority in the church concentrated above the local congregation. He didn't want to leave and his congregation didn't want him to go. The decision he faced was whether to become what in business and sports jargon today would be called a "free agent."

St. Paul was a little more than four decades old in the late 1880s, with a population of around 40,000. It was turning from a prairie capital into an industrializing city, however, and largely due to immigration from Europe its population would reach more than 133,000 in 1890. The rebellion led by Smith and his congregants against an outside bureaucracy was a moment in that modernization process. Other sizable congregations had also formed in the city and were building impressive places of worship, particularly downtown. As they did, the churches formed not just a spiritual center for the city, but also an intellectual one, serving as gathering places for education, music, and politics. Thus, Smith's desire to stay and build a church would influence St. Paul civic culture and politics for years to come.

Leonard Straight, a St. Paul attorney and Peoples Church officer, wrote of Smith, "Early in his maturity he burst the bonds of creed and ecclesiastical polity, and planted himself on the simple faith and practices of primitive Christianity." Straight described the flowering that was happening at the end of the nineteenth century in science, philosophy, literature, history and theology and said that Smith "drank deep of the founts of inspiration opening all about him. Yet reared and educated in the middle west, he escaped the trammels and the narrowing influence of any special school of thought."[7]

Methodist leaders tried to stop Smith from breaking away. Two days before Christmas in 1887, Smith resigned from the First Methodist Episcopal Church of St. Paul in particular and from Methodism in general. In his letter to Cyrus David Foss, the Minneapolis-based bishop for the region, he explained that he objected to the Methodist policy of rotating ministers every few years, and that "he feels that better work and more work can be done by him if untrammeled by the orthodox Methodist rules." Two days later Smith met with twenty-two men, most from his late congregation, to organize a new church "on nondenominational lines . . . with a Congregational form of government."[8]

Smith's Core Beliefs

The new Peoples Church met for the first time on January 8, 1888, in the Grand Opera House, and Smith gave a sermon titled "The Church for Today." It was a message that for years would stand as organizing doctrine for the church and summation of Smith's core beliefs. A souvenir brochure given by the church to its visitors in

The Reverend Dr. Samuel G. Smith, D.D., as a young man. Photo courtesy of Philip J. Ramstad

the early 1900s reprinted the sermon in full. Fresh from his tussle with the Methodist denomination, the sermon shows that the divisiveness of churches and church leaders was on Smith's mind. "What then stands in the way of the Christian unity so many Christians are seeking to restore?" Smith asked. "Nothing except human opinions. . . . Does anyone ask why? The answer is easy: These are questions about which the Scriptures give no definite statement, and are, therefore, left to the individual conscience and judgment."

As he and his followers stepped out of the comfort of formal denominational

structure, Smith tried to assure them and, perhaps, give them something to tell their neighbors who would no doubt ask what exactly their strange, unaffiliated church was about. "First let me say we will not antagonize any of the Christian churches. There is not one of them that does not bear the honors of great achievement," he said. And he added they remained "brethren of Matthew Simpson, the Methodist; Phillips Brooks, the Episcopalian; and John Henry Newman, the Roman Catholic. . . . We trace our pedigree and acknowledge our debt to the past—to Wesley and to Jonathan Edwards; to Luther and Loyola; to James and to Paul; for each of these, as it was given to him, sought to bring the world near to God."

And then he got to the heart of it: "The Peoples Church is an effort to restore the primitive simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to bring the great truths of God near to the hearts of men. It is not a revolt, but an idea; not a secession, but a restoration; not an interior church rebellion, but a renaissance of apostolic principles conformed in organization to what we conceive to be the demands of modern life."

On charity and service, Rev. Smith said, "We believe that a Christ-like faith will lead to a Christ-like life, and that we can only truly serve him by imitating him in going about and doing good." Smith declared Peoples Church was free of class and other distinctions but noted that, in service of the poor, it would not exclude the well-to-do. "The church is not meant to be an asylum for cripples but a place where the strong shall be taught not to please themselves but rather to bear burdens for others." In further emphasis, he declared, "And yet there is no one so poor, so ignorant, so helpless or so sinful that he may not hope to find ministry among us."[9]

Ten days after that service, members adopted articles of incorporation and a set of rules for the church. On January 25th, nine adults were baptized and 19 were received into the church on "vows." On February 1, a church roll was read with 140 names and the first officers were elected. Plans for a building moved quickly, with construction starting later that year and finishing in the spring of 1889. The structure at Pleasant and Chestnut was dedicated on Palm Sunday 1889.

A view of the auditorium at Peoples Church in the late 1930s showing how many people it could hold for a worship service, concert, talk, or other program. Photo by Kenneth M. Wright Studios. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The Church in the World

From the beginning, the Peoples Church hosted public gatherings for concerts and lectures. Its outreach included an industrial training school housed in the basement. A 1900 publication on the church and popular education said Peoples Church "has given prominence to an industrial school and maintains a parish house with various social and educational features." It added, "The Peoples Church has cultivated friendly relations with poor people and has a so-called Salvage Bureau for the rescue and proper clothing of unfortunate families."[10]

In 1892, Peoples Church blurred the color line by welcoming a performance of black singers organized by a professor named S.C. White. "This is the first local Afro-American organization which has appeared in this popular place," *The Appeal,* a St. Paul-based newspaper focused on the black community, reported a few days before the event. "To say that an organization is to appear at the Peoples Church is to at once stamp it as first class and assure its success."[11] Farther down the page, another small item signed by White invited "every Colored person of respectable character to join the chorus. Learn the songs and sing in the grandest concert ever given in Minnesota by colored people," White said. "Everybody is invited. Costs nothing to join."[12] After the concert, the newspaper reported it "pleased a large audience."[13]

The church did not stay unaffiliated for long. In 1893, Peoples Church joined the Congregational Conference, a denomination that believed in governance at the church level rather than from a divisional or higher office that told congregations what to do. Peoples Church founded two mission chapels in the 1890s. One, "The West Side Chapel," later became known as the German Peoples Church and later as the Riverview Congregational Church. The second mission was known as the "Hazel Park Chapel" and later as the Hazel Park Congregational Church.[14]

The church building burned in spectacular fashion on January 29, 1902, in a fire that wasn't as damaging as the one to come in 1940, but close. The pipe organ produced a report so loud firemen at first suspected some explosive chemical inside. The roof fell in with a great crash.

The *St. Paul Globe* described the building as "completely gutted," though the outer walls remained. Pastor Smith lost his extensive personal library, including rare and irreplaceable volumes. Nothing inside could be salvaged.[15]

The Church Rebuilds

Rebuilding began almost as soon as the embers had cooled. During the rebuilding, services were held in the Metropolitan Opera House. In late 1902, the new Peoples Church building was completed and occupied by the congregation. The interior was updated and more functional. In one description, the church was called "far more beautiful than before." Larry Millett, in an essay about the church, said the roofline was "less picturesque."[16]

In the process of rebuilding after the 1902 fire, the church added to its collection of paintings, sculptures, and stained glass windows that collectively came to be called its "silent sermons." Visitors who came to hear performances sponsored by the Schubert Club or the Orpheus Club, or to a variety of other concerts or lectures, could absorb the spirit of the church and Smith's beliefs in inclusiveness and service simply by looking around.

On entering the sanctuary, the platform, organ, paintings and windows came into view. The great organ in massive oak, with pipes of delicate blue touched with gold, dominated the front of the auditorium. The representative of the Hutchings-Votey Company said, "We have built a few larger organs but there is no better organ in this or any other country." At the far corner of the back gallery, 110 feet away from the organist, was an "echo organ." The three-manual organ had more than 2,000 pipes—488 in the grand organ, 903 in the swell organ, 366 in the choir, and 244 in the echo organ.

In front of the organ and the choir was a stage, or chancel, for the pulpit, lectern, and two double-stall seats, all of which were designed especially for Peoples Church. The brass lectern was particularly striking: an eagle mounted on a base representing the four gospels. On the floor level was a communion table—a gift of the wife of D.S.B. Johnson, owner of a prominent land company—that was flanked during church services by two candelabras. Between the double-stall seats was a reproduction of "Christ and the Rich Young Man," an 1889 painting by the German artist Heinrich Hoffman. The painting depicts a wealthy man feeling remorse and shame in the moment after Christ tells him that, to enter heaven, he should give up his riches. John D. Rockefeller Jr. in the 1930s purchased the original for the Riverside Church in New York City.

The center rear of the auditorium of the Peoples Church included the statue "Christus" by Bertel Thorvaldsen. Photo courtesy of Philip J. Ramstad.

On the front wall, framing the chancel, choir and organ, was a great arch and spandrels on either side. As the visitor gazed outward from the spandrels, there were two giant murals painted by Carl Gutherz, a Swiss-born American artist.[17] On the right side, the mural depicted a large figure of Truth holding the motto, "The truth shall make you free." The Apostle Paul was depicted pointing toward Truth. Other figures representing modern thought and discovery were also in the mural, including Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther and Erasmus. On the left side, Gutherz painted the figure of Love upholding the words, "The greatest of these is love." The Red Cross and other symbols of faith, hope, and charity appeared and a lighthouse represented the word of God.

On the other three sides of the auditorium, 67 stained glass windows delivered the other "silent sermons." The windows on the left represented "the divine side of religion," with twelve that were each dedicated to an Apostle. A great central window represented Christ and was divided into two parts. The lower depicted Christ and the woman at the well—*the teaching Christ*—and the upper part contained a representation of the chief events in the life of Christ from the Annunciation to the Ascension.

The windows on the right represented "the human side of religion." Twelve lower windows were portraits of leaders such as Moses, St. Francis of Assisi, Emerson, and John Knox. Twelve windows above bore symbolic figures representing great human interests from painting to music to literature to philanthropy.

In the rear of the sanctuary, ten windows bore the Lord's Prayer and were arranged on either side of a great rose window, a reproduction of Plockhurst's "Christ Among the Lilies." Six windows were presented as national memorials: Gustavus Adolphus by the Swedes; Joan of Arc by the French; St. Patrick by the Irish; John Brown by African Americans; Queen Victoria by the English; and St. Olaf by the Norwegians. A window to Music was presented to the church by local musicians; one to Science by school teachers; one to Patriotism by the Grand Army of the Republic, and one to Labor by labor unions.

By 1910, the church had received about 1,500 members, the majority by "church vows." Some had died and many had moved away, the report stated, but there were 700 active communicants, and "at least thirty-five hundred people look to this church for pastoral care and religious instruction."[18]

Smith Leads the Way

Smith's appetite for work was prodigious. He served on the St. Paul School Board 1892 to 1896 and was instrumental in organizing the Associated Charities in 1892 (a predecessor of what later became Family

Rev. Samuel G. Smith about the time he was 60. Photo from the Saint Paul Pioneer Press, *February 25, 1912. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

Service of Saint Paul). He was active in prison ministry and became president of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections and of the American Prison Congress. He joined the faculty of the University of Minnesota in 1890 as its first lecturer in sociology (then in the Political Science department), and was promoted to professor in 1901. In 1903, while still a full-time pastor, he taught all three of the sociology courses offered at the University. When a Department of Sociology was formed in 1908, Smith was chosen chairman and remained so into 1914. He wrote at least five books of sociology, and other books, and many of his speeches were published.[19]

A 1912 history of St. Paul spoke of the "unique and useful position" the Peoples Church held "among the religious bodies of the city" and referred to Smith's "nationwide reputation as an orator, clergyman, sociologist, and philanthropist." Smith's 60th birthday, March 7, 1912, was celebrated in high style, with scarcely an empty seat at Peoples Church. Governor Adolph O. Eberhart praised him for his work in sentencing reform; St. Paul Mayor Herbert Keller for his service to sound money and the Republican Party; F.E. Hoffman for his support of organized labor; and University of Minnesota president Cyrus Northrop for his scholarship. Ramsey County District Court Judge Oscar Hallam said: "The religious teachings of Dr. Smith are not confined to . . . People's church. He is known by reason of his tongue and pen . . . in every English-speaking nation."[20] That same year, Smith addressed the first International Congress on Eugenics in London arguing against the notion of promoting "race betterment through better breeding" and urging more attention to social and psychological forces.[21]

By 1913, some churches had already moved out of downtown St. Paul. Smith challenged the congregation to raise $100,000 by January 1, 1914, to endow a continuing ministry in the downtown. The goal was realized, and the ministry continued for the next twenty-five years through the World War I and the Great Depression. But it would do so without its founder and leader. On March 25, 1915, just three weeks after his 63rd birthday, Smith fell ill of blood poisoning and died. He left a wife and five adult children.[22]

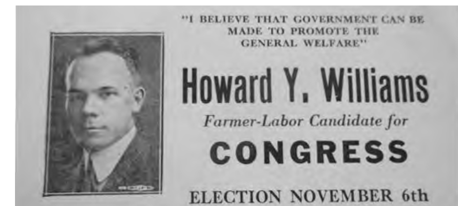
The *Congregationalist and Christian World* magazine, published in Chicago, announced his death under the headline, "A Leader in the Northwest." "He was an unusually effective leader and in constant demand for addresses on important public occasions. Genial and lovable, he made hosts of friends and his death at the comparatively early age of sixty-three takes away one of our most trusted and useful leaders in the entire Northwest."[23] Hobart K. Painter, writing in a history of Congregationalism in Minnesota, called Smith "one of the towering personalities of the period." He said Smith's "one comprehensive message was the gospel of the Kingdom, with all its inclusions and its applications to the whole area of human life."[24]

And in his monograph about Smith published the following year, Leonard Straight wrote, "To those who were privileged to hear him regularly during the years, he became more than simply preacher and scholar. He was a form of thought, a standard of comparison."[25] On the day of Smith's funeral, people lined up for hours to walk by his casket at the front of the church. "Rich and poor, broadcloth and rags, cultured and ignorant, native and foreign, white and black, with bowed heads, and many weeping eyes, came to do honor to his memory," Straight wrote.[26]

After Smith

As happens today with modern megachurches that are built around the personality of their founding minister, Peoples Church was never the same after Smith's death. A minister named James Robert Smith, who was not related, succeeded him in 1916. The second Rev. Smith stayed just three years before being called to an administrative role at the Congregational Church Building Society in New York. The church's third minister was thirty-year-old Howard Y. Williams who had just finished two years as a wartime chaplain in the U.S. Army. He'd studied at the University of Minnesota as an undergraduate and gone straight into military service after his ordination, from Union Theological Seminary in New York, in 1917.

Williams was almost as charismatic as Smith had been, and the church thrived under his leadership. He believed in the "Social Gospel," the church attending not just to spiritual, but also to material needs of the community.[27] Williams focused on community outreach and embraced something new, movies, which were shown on Friday nights at the church. "With our institution located in a downtown area, the children of our poorer families were attending theatres that screened inferior films, and we felt it to be the duty of the church to provide clean entertainment for them at the close of the school week," he explained in a 1923 article. "We conduct the exhibitions in our church auditorium and use our splendid organ to provide the music." He created what he called a Neighborhood House (not to be confused with the West Side's Neighborhood House) to serve children and adolescents with clubs, sports,



A campaign poster for Howard Y. Williams, former minister at Peoples Church, who was an unsuccessful candidate for Minnesota's Fourth Congressional District seat in the 1936 election. Photo from the Melvin Maas Papers, courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Programming for children, such as this Mother Goose party, was a staple of Rev. Howard Williams's ministry at Peoples Church in the 1920s. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Scouting, and vocational classes. In 1923 he counted over 1,200 child participants per week. Williams kept the church building busy every day.

Backed by labor progressives, Williams ran for mayor of St. Paul in 1926 and finished a close second to Laurence C. Hodgson in the primary that year, then lost to Hodgson decisively in the general election. Thus began a long political career. Two years later he was the Farmer Labor party candidate for Congress from the Fourth Congressional District. Williams left Peoples Church in 1929, after ten years as pastor, to become a national political organizer and, later, a power in the Farmer-Labor Party. Many years later he returned to the ministry as a Congregational pastor in Butte, Montana.[28]

In 1930, Rev. Thomas Frederick Rutledge Beale, yet another native of England, became the fourth and final minister of Peoples Church. At age forty when he arrived in St. Paul, Beale was a tall, white-haired gentleman who wore a black cutaway coat and striped trousers in the pulpit. His sermons appealed to my father, who expected thoughtful and scholarly presentations. I was too young to have gotten much from them, but I remember pulpit exchanges Beale had with rabbis and clergy from black churches.

In the difficult 1930s, the endowment established in 1914 to insure the ministry of Peoples Church downtown was hit hard—and membership fell steadily. In 1938, the Peoples Church reported 222 members, down from 290 reported in 1929. While there was probably revenue coming in from various groups renting its space for concerts and lectures, the large building became too expensive for the congregation.

A Merger and a Move

In the fall of 1938, Beale accepted a call to serve the Wellington Avenue Congregational Church in Chicago. His last Sunday was January 1, 1939. The following Sunday, the Reverend Wilbur J. Humber, the young pastor of the Highland Park Community Congregational Church on Snelling Avenue, preached at Peoples Church. Ten days later, the two churches voted to merge and, just two weeks after that, services began in the Highland Park church's smaller, newer building at Snelling and Watson.

The pulpit, communion table, double-stall pulpit seats, the brass eagle lectern, and the painting of "Christ and the Rich Young Ruler" were moved to the renamed Peoples Highland Park Church. The congregation joined the United Church of Christ denomination in the 1960s and remained a fixture on Snelling for several more decades.

But because the Highland Park church building was not able to support the weight of the Thorvaldsen statue, it remained in the big downtown building, where it was damaged in the fire in 1940. That fire engulfed the entire building, destroying the roof and even taking down some of the walls. A photo in the *Minneapolis Star Journal* showed a portion of one wall silhouetted in the night sky against the roaring flames inside. After the fire, the damaged statue was wrapped in a protective cover and moved behind a vestibule outside the Peoples Highland Park building. In the early 1950s, it was repaired and placed in a garden facing Snelling Avenue. The statue remained outside for decades and wore down in the elements. In the early 1990s, when it was nearly a century old, the congregation that took control of the Peoples Highland Park building in the early 1980s sold it to a monument company.[29] Its base remains sunken in the ground today.

Interstate 35E now covers the site of the Peoples Church, but vestiges remain. When Peoples Highland Park UCC closed in 1979, the brass lectern of the Peoples Church was moved to the Olivet Congregational United Church of Christ in St. Paul. The financial assets of the church went to the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ as the Peoples Highland Park endowment fund, which still serves people in need. And the building on Snelling in 2014 was purchased by the Medhanie Alem Eritrean Evangelical Church. At the back of the sanctuary stands the communion table of the Peoples Church, upon which Smith broke bread and blessed wine.

In his inaugural sermon at Peoples Church, Smith declared, "We claim partnership in all the noble souls and in all the great achievements of our common faith." Throughout America's great struggles in the second half of the twentieth century—in military conflicts or in fights for civil rights, women's equality, the dignity and equality of gays and lesbians—critics accused the nation's churches and its leaders of being slow to join in. But in the heart of St. Paul at the end of the nineteenth century, a large community of faith gathered around a man who challenged the old order and urged followers to embrace all people, from all religions and all ethnic groups. They built a mammoth building that, for several decades, served the city as its biggest indoor gathering place—where a president of the United States and an ad hoc choir of local African Americans were equally welcome.

In the time of rapid industrialization, booming immigration, and equally swift changes in scholarly and religious thought, the Peoples Church was one of the leading places for people in St. Paul to adjust to modernization and imagine the best of it, while all around those who spent time in the church were reminders of the great achievements and figures—religious and secular—of the past. Samuel Smith built the Peoples Church, he said, not as a revolt but as an idea: that primitive simplicity and great truths are always near.

Philip J. Ramstad is a retired clergyman who, with his family, attended the Peoples Church in the 1930s and Peoples Highland Park Congregational Church in the 1940s. A native of St. Paul, he graduated from Central High School (1947), the University of Minnesota (1950), and Union Theological Seminary in New York (MDiv, 1953). He served Congregational and United Church of Christ congregations for over 60 years.

The Peoples Highland Park Congregational Church at 562 Snelling Avenue in 1952. A few years later, a wing with offices and classrooms was added on the right rear and the "Christus" statue was installed on the front lawn to the left. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Endnotes

1. *St. Paul Dispatch,* March 22, 1940, p. 1.

2. Larry Millett, *Lost Twin Cities* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992), 208.

3. Montgomery Schuyler in "Western Architecture," page 301, cited by Millett, ibid., 208. Schuyler was a prominent New York journalist whose views on art, architecture, literature, and music were widely accepted as normative.

4. *Minneapolis Star Journal,* March 22, 1940, p. 1.

5. Peoples Church, *Silent Sermons of Peoples Church* (St. Paul: Peoples Church, undated).

6. "A Clergyman Prostrated," *New York Times,* August 16, 1884.

7. Leonard Straight, *Samuel G. Smith, Pastor, Teacher, Friend* (St. Paul: Baker Printing Co., 1916), 3.

8. *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 25 December 25, 1887, p. 1; December 27, 1887, p. 5; *New York Times,* December 25, 1887, p. 1; Peoples Church, *Souvenir, Peoples Church* (St. Paul: Kamman-Art Print. Co., 1911).

9. *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* January 9, 1888, p. 5. Smith's theology was decidedly liberal. According to Leonard Straight, "His merciless logic disposed for all time of a personal devil, hell-fire, original sin, fall of man, and similar medieval bogies" (Straight, *Samuel Smith,* 7).

10. Herbert Baxter Adams, *The Church and Popular Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1900), 31.

11. *The Appeal,* March 12, 1892, p. 3.

12. Ibid.

13. *The Appeal,* March 18, 1892, p. 4.

14. "History of Hazel Park Congregational United Church of Christ," www.hazelparkucc.org/our-history/.

15. *St. Paul Globe,* January 30, 1902, pp. 1, 7, and 17.

16. Millett, 209.

17. Gutherz was very much in demand in St. Paul in the late nineteenth century. He painted the official portraits of at least seven Minnesota governors.

18. *Souvenir, Peoples Church.*

19. University of Minnesota Archives, Department of Sociology Records, 1931, 1938–1958, accessed online March 20, 2016. The University of Minnesota libraries hold five Smith sociology titles: *Social Standards* (1905); *The Industrial Conflict: A Series of Chapters on Present-Day Conditions* (1907); *Religion in the Making: A Study in Biblical Sociology* (1910); *Democracy and the Church* (1912); and *Social Pathology* (1923); plus *For Eyes That Weep* (1899); *Retribution and Other Addresses* (1900); and *Psychology of Crime* (1901), a speech.

20. Henry A. Castle, *History of St. Paul and Vicinity* (St. Paul: Lewis Publishing Co., 1912), 2:538; *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* March 8, 1912, p. 10.

21. "1890s–1930: Eugenics in the Progressive Era," www.uvm.edu/~eugenics/whatis1.html

22. *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* March 26, 1915, p. 1; *St. Paul Dispatch,* March 26, 915, p. 1. Smith's death certificate, #1915-021398, gives his causes of death as acute uremia, pulmonary edema, and acute cardiac dilatation—an enlarged heart—and noted that he had suffered "chronic interstitial nephritis," a kidney ailment, for over ten years.

23. Robert P. Herrick, "A Leader in the Northwest," *Congregationalist and Christian World,* April 1, 1915, p. 413.

24. Rev. Hobart K. Painter, "Memorials of Pastors and Laymen, 1891–1920"; Warren Upham, editor, *Congregational Work of Minnesota 1832–1920* (Minneapolis: Congregational Conference of Minnesota, 1921), 298–99.

25. Straight, 4.

26. Ibid. 17.

27. Readers who want to know more about the Social Gospel in the U.S. at this time should consult Walter Rauschenbusch's *Christianizing the Social Order* (1912) and *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907) and Ronald C. White Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (1976).

28. Paul D. Nelson, "Maas vs. Williams: When Ramsey County Politics Had an Edge," *Ramsey County History* 50:2 (Summer 2015): 3–12; "The Tidings, Peoples Church Quarterly," April 1923, p. 8; Catalogue of National Non-theatrical Motion Pictures, Inc. (1923); *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* March 17, 1926, p. 1: Williams, a political newcomer, lost to city controller Hodgson by 1,869 votes, and went on to lose every election in which he ran.

29. Author interview with Duane Hanson, Established Heart Ministries, St. Paul, February 2016.

R.C.H.S.
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