

# West Side Spiritualist Church History

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*Research and resources provided in part by Columbus Metropolitan Library, Local History & Genealogy*

The existing structure is an approx. 9,000 square foot, two-story building at 79 McDowell Street that was constructed in 1912. The adjacent brick residence was constructed before 1887. The property was donated to the church and may have been connected. The 1891 Sanborn Map indicates the YMCA Chapel on this site. The church has two asymmetrical westwork towers between a gable-front with an arched window opening that contains a rose window and stone tracery. An entrance is located at each tower. The exterior walls consist of 8" load bearing concrete masonry units with a 4" masonry veneer. A 1974 cornerstone reads "Greater Christ Temple Apostolic Church."

*April 9, 1911 Columbus Dispatch*

## **Valuable Piece of Property Presented to West Side Spiritualist Church.**

"... deeded by Miss Katy Yeiser to the West Side Spiritualist Church on condition that a memorial window be dedicated to her in the new temple, that the congregation pay the expenses of her funeral and she be given \$2,000 in cash for present needs. Miss Yeiser is without near heirs. The property value is \$17,000."

*September 8, 1911 Columbus Dispatch*

**"The Cornerstone of West Side Spiritualist Church will be laid Sunday afternoon at 2 o'clock, corner of State and McDowell streets, with addresses by Mayor George S. Marshall, Judge Samuel L. Black and others."**

*March 4, 1912 Columbus Dispatch*

## **Spiritualists Meet to Dedicate a Church**

" 'A religion that will help us to live, that will teach us concerning our relations with our fellow man,' is the greatest need of church people today, said George B. Warne of Chicago, president of the Spiritualist Association of America, who addressed the West Side Spiritualist Church Sunday. ... His sermon was a part of the dedication of the new church."

## **\*\*The Great Flood Occurs March 23-26, 1913**

<http://www.thisweeknews.com/content/stories/2013/03/26/as-it-were.html>

*May 17, 1913 Columbus Dispatch*

"For the first time since the West Side Flood, services will be held in the West Side Spiritualist Church, State and McDowell. The church, which was practically a new building, was damaged to the extent of about \$1,000. More than 400 people were rescued from the church at the time of the recent flood."

VIEW REAL PHOTO POSTCARD OF FLOOD VIEW WITH HAND WRITTEN MESSAGE ON PG 2 »»



*Real photo postcard of 1913 flood with church in distance and handwritten message on back of postcard: Columbus Metropolitan Library, Columbus Memory Collection Doug Davis 1913 Flood Collection*

*View of the West Side Spiritualist Church at 75 McDowell Street. The flood destruction of the Doddington Company Lumber Yard can be seen in the foreground.*

Am sending you a few  
flood pictures. Will send  
Aunt Fannie some in a  
few days if she would care  
for them. Please let her  
see these. Her mother &  
Stella are safe out North  
so her father says. The  
suffering here is terrible  
was out doing relief work  
yesterday. Lielga was  
helping some at Salvation  
army. Papa has rendered  
his services. Have give all  
clothes & bedding we could  
spare. Let us hear from  
you.  
Anna J.

## **Monument to Spiritualism**

Spiritualism in general and Christian Spiritualism in particular, was, and to many still is, widely believed by a wide variety of people – rich or poor, young or old, healthy or infirm. The message of spiritualism is in its essence quite simple. Combined with Christian ethics, the message of Spiritualism was extremely appealing to many people one hundred years ago.

One of the people who helped bring that message to Columbus, Ohio, was a man named Harry Boerstler. Born in Marysville in 1873, Boerstler had received a “common education” in the public schools of those days and spent at least some of his early adult life with charitable organizations in what at the time was called “welfare work.” He left that employment in 1900 when he was called to serve as a pastor in the Spiritualist Church. By the time he was done, thirty years had passed and he had served longer than any other pastor in his denomination. In that time, he had literally built a church in people and in stone.

Boerstler began his ministry in Franklinton. Originally the pioneer settlement forerunner of Columbus, the state capital across the river, Franklinton by 1900 was a working-class neighborhood filled with people laboring in nearby factories and shops. Many of these people were looking for something to believe in. Harry Boerstler provided hope to that belief. Preaching from his home in a modest one story at McDowell and State Streets, Boerstler built enough of a following to add a second story to his home in 1905.

But to Harry Boerstler and his congregation, what was needed was a real church. What was needed as well was a way to get it built. In 1911, congregation member Katherine Yelser promised to give the church the proceeds from the sale of a building and lot in Columbus. The real estate was on Front Street near downtown and was valued at \$47,000. This may not seem like much today. But in an era when the average working man earned a few dollars a day, this was a lot of money.

Pastor Boerstler built his church on the property at McDowell and State Street. It incorporated both Greek and Romanesque Revival touches and made early use of decorative concrete in its façade. This was not the earliest building to do this. The home of Alan Thurman at 513 East Rich Street used imprint concrete in its façade in 1885. In time, a few other places did so.

This was one of them,

Pastor Boerstler build his church and his congregation over the years until 1930 when he retired for health reasons. He died in 1933 and was buried at Green Lawn Cemetery. He was fifty-nine years old.

Capturing the congregation of its founder, Assistant Pastor John Johnson continued the tradition begun by Boerstler in 1900. The church – with a lot of help from friends and supporters survived for another twenty years at the corner of McDowell and State Streets.

Due to falling attendance, the church had closed a few times earlier to gain strength to go forward. Now new tenants would need to be found who take on the burden of living on the site. In the end, they were found. But even they could not keep the church building open indefinitely.

For the last few years, the great church – built to serve many and doing just that – has stood empty and alone. Now comes development seeking to once again destroy the certain past in search of an uncertain future.

The two ideas – Stand with the past while building a new future are not new notions. They can work together – All we need to do is try. -30-