

MARKING TIME AT REDEEMER – 1926-1930, by Diana Rankin

This is the fifth in a series of articles about Redeemer's history gleaned from *The Redeemer Record* archives and placed in the context of what else was happening in the world, the nation, Minnesota, and the City of St. Paul. Each of the first 3 articles covered a decade, the 4th article 6 years, and this one only 5 years, taking us through 1930. This is the year Redeemer celebrated its 40th Anniversary in the same sanctuary space we worship in today and the world was beginning its long descent into the Great Depression.

1926

- Chiang Kai-shek became leader of China's revolutionary party. U.S. Route 66 was established. A first-class stamp cost 2 cents. Allen Greenspan, Harper Lee, Miles Davis, Andy Griffith, Allen Ginsberg, Tony Bennett, and Robert Bly were born.
- The first Automatic Pop-up toaster was marketed in June 1926 by McGraw Electric Co. in Minneapolis under the name Toastmaster. The Ku Klux Klan burned a cross in St. Paul's Mounds Park, reportedly in response to an alleged assault of a white 17-year-old girl by a black male.
- ✠ ***Redeemer started the year with a total membership of 1,022.***
- ✠ ***In March the congregation began a debt reduction campaign, seeking to reduce the \$56,000 debt by \$25,000 – an astounding \$330,323.70 in 2015 dollars.***
- ✠ ***The St. Olaf Choir sang in the downtown St. Paul Auditorium on April 29th. Redeemer's choir provided supper in the Assembly Room and a choir committee was in charge of publicity for the concert.***

1927

- Captain Charles A. Lindbergh, who was born in Minnesota, flew the *Spirit of St. Louis* on the first New York to Paris nonstop flight. The musical *Show Boat* opened in New York City. Work began on Mount Rushmore.
- ✠ ***At Redeemer, Edna Snyder, Michelle Geschwill's grandmother, and Arthur Bielenberg, Bette Steglich's father, were confirmed.***

1928

- Madame Tussaud's waxwork exhibition opened in London. Herbert Hoover defeated Alfred E. Smith for U.S. President. Walter Mondale, Maya Angelou, Shirley Temple, Frank Borman, and Stanley Kubrick were born.
- Cadwallader Washburn's flour mills on the Mississippi River became General Mills and the company was listed on the New York Stock Exchange. President Coolidge became the first chief executive to visit Minnesota's Iron Range.
- Evelyn Fairbanks (*nee* Edwards), who wrote *Days of Rondo*, was born. She grew up at 532 St. Anthony Avenue (about 2 blocks east of Redeemer) in the Rondo district, "one of St. Paul's 'colored neighborhoods' where white people also lived. (page 1)
- ✠ ***Redeemer had an active membership of 1,043 and 500 children and youth were enrolled in Sunday School.***
- ✠ ***Pastor Lindemann estimated that 5,600 people attended the 7 services held from Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday.***
- ✠ ***Mr. Paul Hennig, Irene Markley's grandfather, was elected to the Vestry. Alice Langevin, who first came to Redeemer through the Sunday School, was confirmed.***

1929

- The German airship Graf Zeppelin completed a round-the-world flight. Mother Teresa arrived in Calcutta to begin her work. The Stock Market crashed on Black Tuesday, October 29th, beginning the Great Depression. The Foshay Tower opened in Minneapolis, but Wilbur Foshay lost his fortune in the Stock Market crash. The Hallie Q. Brown Community Center opened its doors.
- † ***At Redeemer, the Easter Sunday attendance at 2 services was about 2,000. Latecomers were turned away at the Palm Sunday service. The church seating capacity was 988.***
- † ***The Ladies Aid Society made the final payment on their pledge of \$15,000 which purchased the new organ and carpets for the rebuilt sanctuary.***

1930

- Radio broadcasts of “The Lone Ranger” began. The planet Pluto was discovered. The U.S. Veterans Administration was created. The period July 1930 to June 1931 was the driest such period on record and resulted in the Dust Bowl.
- 3M introduced Scotch Tape. Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first American writer to be awarded the prize. One-half of Minnesota’s population was foreign-born, with Germans and Scandinavians as the largest groups. Floyd B. Olson was elected governor.
- St. Paul’s Rondo area was nearly 50% African American. The section west of Dale Street was known as upper Rondo or “Oatmeal Hill” while the section east of Dale was lower Rondo or “Cornmeal Valley.” As African Americans achieved higher social status they moved west of Dale toward Lexington Avenue.
- † ***Redeemer’s total membership in January was 1,186. That month the congregation published a special edition of The Redeemer Record, celebrating its 25th anniversary. Depending on the season, 1,500-2,500 copies of The Record were printed each month and the cost for mailing it to 700 families and 300 prospects was \$1,200 annually.***
- † ***On February 23rd, the congregation celebrated its 40th Anniversary with festival services.***
- † ***Noting that the 6:15 a.m. service on Christmas Day “has been dangerously overcrowded,” a second service was held at 10:45 a.m.***

A personal note: It can be disheartening for us to read how Redeemer had more than 1,000 members in the 1920s with 2,000 or more worshipping on Easter Sunday. In 1911, when Redeemer built on the corner of Dale and Carroll, it selected a site “said to be one of the highest spots in the Mississippi valley.” (*St. Paul Dispatch*, March 18, 1911) Congregational leaders were wise in choosing this location. There were plans for a streetcar line along Dale Street and the neighborhood was growing rapidly with working-class families, many of whom wanted to belong to an English-speaking Lutheran congregation or to send their children to a nearby Sunday School. Growth was inevitable and serving the surrounding neighborhood was Redeemer’s mission in 1911 and through the next 50 years.

But the world changed. Urban renewal (to which Redeemer contributed), construction of Interstate 94 which ripped through the African-American community, racial turmoil, and white flight to “safer” neighborhoods and the suburbs changed both demographics and neighborhood dynamics. As a result, fewer than 100 worship today in a sanctuary built to seat 988 people. Redeemer’s mission today is not that of 1911, 1922, or 1930. It is unlikely that we will ever again even half-fill the sanctuary on Sunday morning.

None of this means, however, that we shouldn’t remember and celebrate Redeemer’s heritage. Instead this is an opportunity to learn from the past, admire the courage and vision of those who founded and built the congregation, and then go on to envision a future constructed from today’s reality.