A Look Back in Time

The **Henry M. Simmons Memorial Church**, currently called the Bradford Community Church, is located at **5810 Eighth Avenue.** Section 15.04 of the City's Zoning Ordinance established six standards for designating structures and sites as historic, and a site or structure must meet at least one of the six standards. Simmons Memorial Church meets standards one, two, three and six. Standard one reads: "Exemplifies or reflects the City's cultural, social, economic, political, engineering and/or architectural history." The building at one time housed the innovative Boys and Girls Library, a library devoted exclusively to children. Standard two reads: "Is identified with historic personages or with important events in the City's history." The Henry M. Simmons Memorial Church was constructed during the pastorate of Florence Buck, one of the first and most notable women ordained in the Unitarian faith. Standard three reads: "Embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship." Small in size, the Simmons Memorial Church represents the classic form of the English Neo-Gothic country church. Standard six applies: "Historic structures and sites which are on the National or State Register of Historic Places shall be designated as a City historic structure or site." Since the structure is listed on the National Register, the structure is also designated according to the ordinance. The church was originally designated in 1980 and re-designated on January 5, 1995.

Constructed in 1907, the former Henry M. Simmons Memorial Church is a small, coursed limestone Neo-Gothic church, with a gable-roofed nave flanked on the northeast corner by a crenelated square tower. The double-door entrance is set into a pointed arch with stone label molding in the center of the tower, atop a short flight of stairs. A cusped perpendicular window with leaded glass fills the front elevation. Stone-trimmed limestone buttresses reinforce the corners and south wall of the building; the buttress between the front gable and tower rises full-height to become a polygonal bartizan. Paired open arches in the bell-tower are half-filled with louvers and are cusped in the arch. A small, gabled-roof chapel (once housing the organ) projects from the north side; an open, cloister-like adjunct to the office on the south side (with exterior access) balances the plan. A stone water table coursing the whole marks the juncture of the walls with the coursed limestone foundation beneath.

Born in Kenosha, N. Max Dunning (1873-1945) was to play a significant part in the practice of architecture and in the profession. Dunning studied at the University of Wisconsin before entering the Chicago office of J.C. Llewellyn. Developing a specialty in school and industrial design, he later opened his own office in Chicago from which he practiced until 1933. During World War II, Dunning was appointed to the U.S. Housing Commission and served on the Emergency Commission on Unemployment. During the Roosevelt administration, Dunning served with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, as Assistant Director of Housing of the Public Works Administration, as Assistant in the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department, as Assistant Commissioner of Buildings of the P.W.A., and as Assistant Advisor to the Public Buildings Administration. Dunning was elected to the Chicago Chapter of the A.I.A. in 1915, rising to Fellow in 1919. After serving three years on the National Board of Directors, Dunning was elected Vice-President of the Institute in 1924. He was instrumental in the founding of the Architectural League of America and was elected its first president. In addition to the Simmons Memorial Church, Dunning designed the City Hospital in Kenosha, a four-story red brick monolith with Neo Classical-Arts and Crafts decoration. Dunning's better-known Chicago works include the American Book Company Building (1912), Fourteenth Church of Christ Scientist (1923), and the Furniture Mart. Small in size, the Simmons Memorial Church represents the classical form of the English Neo-Gothic country church, with its Medieval elements (tower, crenelations, stone arches and carvings, trussed ceiling, and windows) executed with restrained richness. The Economical interior design (with vestibule leading directly to the nave, choir, and ancillary spaces) rendered in the picturesque forms of tower, side chapels, and cloister, reveal a familiarity with Gothic vocabulary and a clear concept of the program. The quality of the stone cutting and construction, and of the few carved elements inside, show an appreciation of the textural potential of the materials.

The Henry M. Simmons Memorial Church was constructed in 1907 during the pastorate of Florence Buck (1860-1925), one of the first and most notable women ordained in the Unitarian faith. Florence Buck studied for the ministry in England and America, receiving her ordination at Meadville Theological School in 1894. After a brief pastorate in Cleveland (which she shared with another early woman minister, Marian Murdock, she began her years in Kenosha preaching there for 10 years between 1901 and 1910. She was the first woman to have a ministry in Kenosha, and proved to be very capable to the task, introducing several innovations including the new church building. After leaving Kenosha, she handled various administrative duties until 1912, when she became the associate secretary of the Department of Religious Education for the American Unitarian Association. She remained at her duties in Boston for the rest of her life, supervising the publication of various religious materials for the Unitarian church and the educational branch of the ministry. At her death in 1925, Florence Buck was acting director of the department and highly praised for her contributions to religious matters.

In 1929, the Simmons Memorial Church was purchased by the City of Kenosha and converted into a library solely devoted to children. The Boys and Girls Library served as a combination education center and child-sitter for the City's pre-adolescent population. The City sold the building to a restauranteur in 1979 and it was home to several eateries and bars. The building was reclaimed in 1993 by the the Kenosha Chapter of the Unitarian Church and renamed the Bradford Community Church taking it's name from a local educator and lay leader of the congregation, Mary D. Bradford. It's fortunate for the Unitarian Church that this historic building was able to come full circle for their congregation.