

The need for a church in this new development

The history of Como Church is linked to the history of Elwell's addition to SE Minneapolis. During the 1880s Minneapolis experienced a real estate boom followed by a bust. In many localities the improvements were of a mushroom growth; and a few years later they stood or leaned, unoccupied, a monument to the boom time. Such buildings were in evidence up to within a very few years in all parts of the suburbs of our city.

In the spring of 1882 James T. Elwell, then a young man who had achieved success as a manufacturer of spring beds, purchased a tract of land consisting of about 100 acres lying to the east of the then St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railroad Co., now the Great Northern, on either side of what was then known as Como Road.

This was a marshy piece of ground having only a few high spots of solid earth. A few straggling cottonwood and oak trees in the neighborhood of 13th Ave. and 12th St. marked one of these high places and from here sand was hauled out to the new streets before the lumber for the houses could be delivered. The sand was taken out during the winter month when the bog was frozen. When spring melts arrived the sand would settle in to the bog and secure the roadway.

During the first year of house building, many and loud were the curses of the lumber teamsters, who, by accident, let the horses or wagon wheels get off these sand made tracks; for there was apparently no bottom to the bog, and one could step off of the sidewalk in any place into the mud.

In order to drain the land and make it possible to dig cellars for the new houses, ditches were dug on either side of the street. Later these ditches were boxed and sidewalks built over them.

Timeline of notable events

1882 – Como Ave Congregational began

1887 – new church building dedicated

1893 – financial panic

1906 – \$7,500 addition to the church

1907 – 25-year Silver Anniversary

1915 – large pipe organ ordered & dedicated

1932 – 50-year Golden Anniversary

1948 – automatic oil heat had been added in the primary rooms; recreation room downstairs had been remodeled

~1950 – name was officially changed to Como Congregational Church

1952 – old organ was replaced with a new electronic one

~1985 – Como Evangelical Free Church began calling this home

According to Pastor Fuller, "This quarter of the city where this church is located and now known as Elwell's Addition has, on account of the peculiar formation of the land, been a wet, marshy tract of ground and with all the level ground to the north and east as far as the bluffs, has been regarded as unfit for building purposes. But by a thorough system of drainage it has been greatly improved. The first house in this Addition was begun early in May and before winter more than 40 had been erected and some 30 families had moved into their new homes (mostly newly married couples). Many of these families had bought their houses to be paid for in monthly installments and as the times were then prosperous and the city growing rapidly, the

community seemed to be in a very thriving condition. The majority of these first families were inclined to the Congregational faith, many of them being members of the First Congregational Church which at that time was located at the corner of 5th St. and 3rd Ave. SE. All of the other churches were located further north at that time."

The new residents found themselves in need of a church home and soon reached the conclusion that religious services of some kind should be established in the community. About the first of September, 1882, a Sunday School was organized in a vacant house on the east side of 16th Ave. about halfway between Talmadge and Como Ave. Later on a dwelling house on 14th Ave was arranged by James T. Elwell for Sunday School and chapel services.

Within two years the area experienced a time of financial and business depression. Building in most parts of Minneapolis had been over-done and rents greatly reduced. With this turn of events it was difficult to raise money. Fully one-third of the houses in the addition were vacant and there was only a small increase in the number of families in the congregation.



The Elwells: here, gone, & back again

The Elwell family was hurt by the financial panic as well. James & Lizzie Elwell moved from their home at 903 15th Ave SE to Golden Lake Farm, in eastern Anoka County, in 1891-1892. They returned to the area about 1902 to a remodeled home at 945 14th Ave SE.



Maria Sanford

Dr. Maria L. Sanford of blessed memory came to be a friend and neighbor of Como Church where she often preached helpful, inspiring sermons and set an example with her unselfish and noble life. Dr. Sanford preached at the 25th Anniversary of the church, speaking on "The Church in the Community: Its Expected Results".



The Good Old Days of the 1880's according to Mrs. James T. (Lizzie Alden) Elwell

"Let us go back to the Good Old Days of fifty years ago, when Como Church was organized in Elwell's Addition, than which a more forlorn, desolate tract was never reclaimed. Think of the poorly graded streets, wooden sidewalks no water mains or sewer – kerosene street lamps, if there was any lighting, and in place of our beautiful shade trees, bare sticks on either side of the walks. Not even horse cars nearer than Fourth Street. Telephones so new that they were an awesome contraption, where one stood up and hollered into the receiver." (1932)

December 19, 1882 – initial members of Como Ave. Congregational Church

- Tallmadge & Margaret M. Elwell
- Mary W. Elwell
- Mattie L. Elwell
- James T. & Lizzie A. Elwell
- George H. Elwell
- Chas. H. Stevens
- Eugenia H. Stevens by letter from the First Congregational Church of St. Anthony
- Belle H. Elwell from Appleton, MN
- C.A. & Cecelia French from Plymouth Church, Minneapolis
- E. & Julia Gurie from Andrew Presbyterian
- Americus & Amelia Fuller (Rochester, MN)
- Rev. Geo. & Emaline Spaulding and Agnes L. & Lucy L., daughters, from Mason, N.H.
- Theodore N. Spaulding from Lowell, Mass.

Ladies' Aid Society

History of Como Church would be incomplete without reference to the Ladies' Aid Society, which was always a strong ally. In addition to the giving of numerous social functions, the Society contributed carpets, two organs, church cushions and hundreds of dollars to meet expenses.

Sunday School

Another important auxiliary force was the Sunday School. Many adults received their early religious instruction at the Como Sunday School.

Maple Hill Mission

When the Rev. Paddock was pastor, Como Church also sponsored the Mission for 5-6 years until the building was sold to the school board. It began in a small cottage with 15 children, and grew to a school of 100 members.

Large pledges made at the January 9, 1887 Dedication of the Como Avenue Congregational Church

\$100	Tallmadge & Margaret (Miller) Elwell
200	Mr. & Mrs. J.S. Pillsbury
100	Rev. C.H. Pratt
100	P.D. McMillan
100	G.A. Wheaton
600	Mr. & Mrs. James T. Elwell
6.35	general hat collection
<u>\$2355.85</u>	

Various members of the Elwell family pledged at least \$1018 of the \$2355.85

The church and grounds cost \$15,000. It could seat 350 in the main audience room, and the adjacent vestry could seat 100. Sittings were free. Voluntary contributions sufficiently met expenses, for a time.

More funds needed

There is a manuscript letter, dated December 24, 1888, which asks members to help meet \$875 MORE the church needed to continue serving the community in 1888; by either: dividing the \$875 equally among "the 100 or more families now living on this side of the Tracks," or, asking those already subscribed to increase their pledge by one-third.

1888 projected costs:

Pastor's salary:	\$1,200
Janitor services:	100
Fuel and lighting:	60
Interest on note for pews:	70
Interest on note for church:	420
Commission for renewing a loan:	160

Total cost to run the Church in 1888: \$2417

Ministers serving Como Church

Rev. Americus Fuller	1882 – 1884
Rev. E.L. Morse	1885
Rev. H.W. Gleason	1885 – 1888
Rev. George W. Paddock	1888 – 1892
Rev. John Stemen	1892 – 1898
Rev. Jay M. Hulbert	1899 – 1905
Dr. Hobart K. Painter	1905 – 1914
Rev. Bertram Willoughby	1914 – 1917
Dr. Earnest Peatfield	1918 – 1922
Rev. John Samuel	1922 – 1925
Rev. W. Miller	1926
Rev. C.J. Schaufuss	1927 – 1931
Dr. Conger	1931
Dr. George Drew	1932 – 1936*
Rev. Barney Crockett	1935* – 1941
Dr. John Powell	1941 – 1944
Rev. Neil Swanson	1945 – 1946
Rev. Ralph Askew	1946 – 1948
Rev. Clayton Stowe	1948 – 1951
Rev. Russell Dierdorff	1951 – 1961
Rev. Einar Martinson	1961 – 1965
Rev. E.R. Spalding	1966 – 1969
Rev. Gregor Kutz	1969 – 1972
Rev. Ralph Jackman	1972 –

Sources:

- Atwater, Isaac, History of Minneapolis (1893), vol. 1, p. 192
- 5-sheet manuscript in the Como Church History scrapbook lent to us by Jon Souer, May-August 2003
 - <http://www.isfc-como.org/ComoHistory.htm>
- 90th Anniversary celebration program, Feb. 1973, from the Como Congregational Church history scrapbook
- Elwell, George H. "Brief History of Como Avenue Congregational Church (from its organization, Dec. 19, 1882 – Dec. 19, 1907, 25 years). Minnesota Historical Society. Manuscripts Note Books: P1189-5. 4 p. Typescript.
- "A Toast of Mrs. J. T. Elwell at the Como Congregational Church on its Golden Jubilee Banquet, November 17, 1932", from the Como Congregational Church history scrapbook, on loan May 2003 from Como Evangelical (John Souer)

A brief history

of the

Como Ave Congregational Church

The building later became home to the Como Evangelical Free Church and then the Oakeshott Institute.

1037 14th Avenue SE
Minneapolis, MN 55414

Church membership over the years

1882	21
1885	33
1907	150
1915	237

"While this church was Congregational in its form of government, it was never sectarian and they had with them Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and many other denominations. Its doors were always open to all who availed themselves of its privileges."

Compiled by the Como history group

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May 2005 with a few updates in 2010