

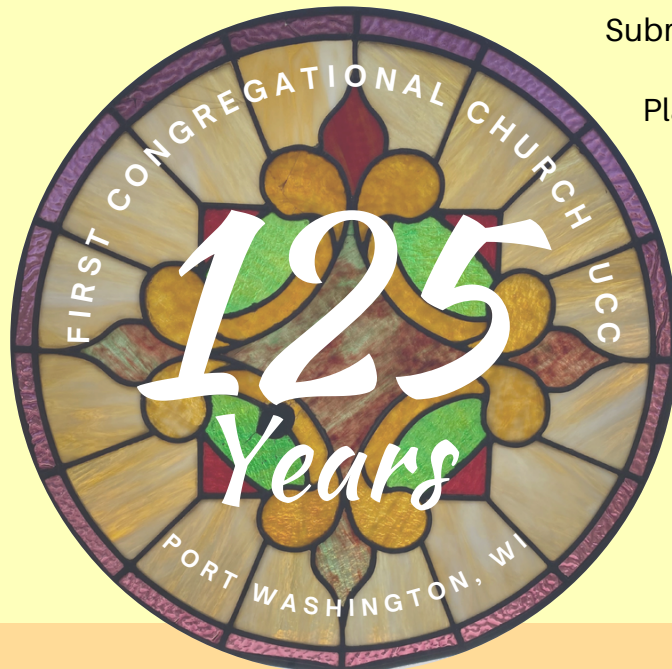
OUR 125TH ANNIVERSARY

First Congregational Church, Port Washington, will celebrate our 125th anniversary year from April 2023 to April 2024. Newsletter articles, bulletin board displays, and special events throughout the coming year will share a variety of “windows” into our past. Our intention is not to be sentimentally nostalgic for the “good old days” but to touch on many aspects of past church community as inspiration for our church members and friends today.

Speaking of windows, the logo for our anniversary year is a window: it is based on the circular stained-glass piece once installed on the west wall of the chancel. This is the oldest stained-glass piece we have and was “discovered” during the installation of the clear glass sanctuary windows in 1991. It was removed, repaired, and mounted so we are able to hang it; the design it creates when hung with our clear prisms cross is known as a Celtic cross-an ancient Christian cross variation that dates back to the early Middle Ages. In a lovely serendipity, this old window hangs approximately where it was before removal. We plan to display this window much of our anniversary year, connecting our past and present.

The theme chosen for the anniversary year is “Rooted in Love.” FCC is indeed “rooted in Love”, planted here in Port Washington near Sauk Creek in 1898. The joys and struggles of the past are our inheritance, as is the building in which we still meet and worship. We are now the stewards of this church community: we are making church history today!

Submitted by Jane Spalding,
125th Anniversary
Planning Team Member



GETTING STARTED - OUR CHURCH HISTORY

In 1898, as a new century approached, a group of Port Washington residents began meeting in the home of John & Julia Dennett to discuss organization of what was to become *The Congregational Church of Port Washington*, the first Congregationalist Church in Ozaukee County.

(continued on the next page)

GETTING STARTED continued...

The Dennett home was located where Port Washington High School is now, and contemporaries called the location Dennett's Hill.



Both John, who was Vice President of the Wisconsin Chair Factory, and his wife Julia had grown up in Congregationalist churches. They invited other English-speaking Protestant friends to join their discussions of a new church. A Methodist Episcopal church was the only English-language church in Port Washington, as the Presbyterian, Protestant Episcopal, and Baptist churches with English-speaking members had already dissolved. The last half of the century had brought large waves of German-speaking and Catholic immigrants to Wisconsin, many settling in Port Washington. Cultural divisions related to language and religious traditions had become more dominant than ethnic divides*; subsequently, people and their churches were aligning broadly with either the uniquely American Protestant "Yankee" values (temperance; personal salvation; congregational versus hierarchical authority) or Teutonic immigrant values (liturgical/ritualistic orientation; hierarchical organization; prescribed practices).* Along with wanting a place of Christian worship for English-speaking persons, the organizers of the new Congregational Church wanted to establish a "freer and more inclusive" community of faith than other churches offered. [Click here](#) to read more on the early churches of Port Washington.

The end of the nineteenth century also brought major economic growth to Port Washington with the arrival of the railroad and two large industrial operations, the Wisconsin Chair Factory (1888) and Gilson Manufacturing (1894). The city's population almost doubled, reaching 3,010 in the century's last decade.

The first services and Sunday School meetings of the new Congregational Church were announced in the local paper and took place starting in March of 1898, using meeting rooms in the County Courthouse, with preaching by Daniel W. Dexter, a "licentiate" student from the Chicago Theological Seminary. Mr. Dexter traveled by train from Chicago on Saturday, stayed overnight as a guest of Dennett's, and led worship and meetings on Sunday before returning to Chicago Sunday afternoon to continue his studies. On April 10, 1898 (Easter Sunday afternoon) a group met and voted to form the new church. The initial membership was 27: 7 men and 20 women. By December 1898, the congregation had built and roofed the basement on the current Webster Street land that had been donated by Fred A. Dennett, President of the Chair Factory, and brother of John. The first worship service in this new building was held December 25, 1898, with dedication in January 1899.

*Buenker, John D., *The History of Wisconsin, vol IV: The Progressive Era, 1893 - 1914*. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. (1998).

Submitted by Louise Mollinger,
125th Anniversary
Planning Team Member