

# A BRIEF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF BONAVISTA METHODIST (MEMORIAL UNITED) CHURCH

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Ronald Strathie, master builder, laid the corner stone of the new church on October 31st, 1918 during a service by Rev. Levi Curtis. Inside the corner stone was laid a box containing copies of the circulating coins, copies of newspapers and the Methodist Monthly Greeting, and a list of the attending officials. Ninety-one year old Charles Saint, Bonavista's oldest resident and the time, declared the stone was declared to be "well and truly laid in the name of the Trinity". The finished church was officially opened Sunday, January 28th, 1923.



At the time of its consecration the church was considered to be the largest wooden church east of Montreal, and the most modern in design in Newfoundland. The third Methodist church on the site since 1814, the building was designed by architect Charles Harris Lench, M. Arch. (Harvard), author of *The Promotion of Commercial Buildings*, first published in 1932, and son to the resident minister, Rev. Charles Lench. Ronald Strathie built several other fine structures in the community including the Roman Catholic Rectory (now Silver Linings B&B), Alexander Chapel of All Souls (Church of England Mortuary Chapel), the courthouse, and the Loyal Orange Hall.

The building measures 124 feet by 65 feet with a timber balloon frame and combination stone/concrete foundation. The exterior is sheathed in narrow white-painted clapboard accentuated with dark trim work. The mid-pitch gable roof is held in place by an elegantly designed open scissor-brace rafter system, the supporting pillars of which also form part of the truss for the sanctuary balcony. The fenestration (or window) pattern includes a course of circular clerestory windows running the full length of each side of the sanctuary, plus two additional clerestory windows flanking the pipe organ in the choir. These upper level windows are designed specifically to make use of natural light, not for viewing. The remainder of the windows are high, relatively narrow, and follow a curved arch design.

The largest window in the church, located in the main facade, is constructed in the same manner, and within its composition the themes of the high narrow curved arch and circular clerestory windows are reiterated and bound in heavy trim with a keystone motif. The curved arch is a motif repeated elsewhere in the building, including the louvred arches on the facade's asymmetrical spires.

The church is of the "Classical Revival Style", widely popular throughout mainland British North America from circa 1820 to 1860. After this period, it faded from popularity as a residential style in the light of different revival and other new styles. In important institutional and commercial buildings, the style continued to be popular, due to its association with stability, propriety, and dignity. Bonavista Methodist Church is a relatively late vernacular incarnation of the style but, as an interpretation, it manages to preserve the main architectural elements.

The medium-pitched gable roof is a common feature of the Classical Revival movement, often with a large centre gable or roof pediment reminiscent of Hellenistic archetypes. The church facade uses a repeated triangular gable design replete with returned eaves in conjunction with pilasters of massive proportions, rendering the main entrance visually evocative of temple architecture. Another common feature of the Classical Revival Style is the use of dentils, tooth-like projections under the eaves. These are seen over the recessed portico and in the soffit work.

The interior of the church is as finely designed as the exterior. Including the choir, the building contains a total of 292 pews made by the Horwood Lumber Company of St. John's (established in 1902), and similar to those in Gower Street Methodist Church, St. John's. The Memorial Pulpit, chairs, communion rail and table were supplied by the Dundas Valley Seating Company. The wood arch behind the pulpit was the work of Ralph Strathie, son of Ronald. The tower clock was purchased from the Howard Clock Company of New York, and installed by Ronald Strathie.

In June of 1925, Bonavista Methodist Church joined with the United Church of Canada. Today, it is one of the largest United churches in the country.