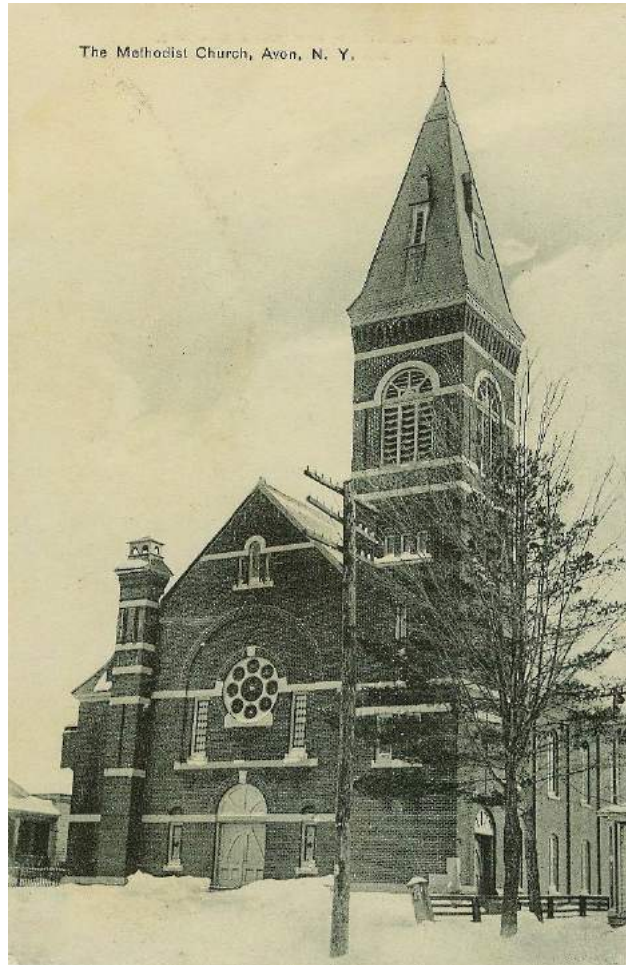


Avon United Methodist Church



Vintage postcard, courtesy of the APHS

There are eight Avon properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, of which seven have been featured in the APHS newsletter. The final of this series will focus on the Avon United Methodist Church, which was listed on the National Register in 2005.

This handsome Late Victorian/ Romanesque brick church is located on the east side of Genesee Street, just south of the business district. Two striking features include the large central oculus window and the tower. A recessed arch accents the round window, composed of eight panes surrounding a central pane. Two vertical windows flank each side. The three-stage tower stands on the south corner, surmounted by a steeply pitched pyramidal roof, and on the northern corner stands a decorative chimney. The building is embellished with rock-faced brownstone band

courses. These architectural highlights along with the overall local historical significance are the features that allowed the Methodist Church to be formally listed on the National Register. The application for the National Register provides this overview:

The Avon United Methodist Church is architecturally significant as a representative intact example of a Romanesque style Protestant church building. Designed by prominent Rochester architect James Cutler, the building combines an efficient plan for a multi-purpose building with modest embellishments in the Romanesque style popular at the time of its construction.

Avon's history of rapid development started with the passing of the land rights from the Seneca Nation to Euro-Americans. In 1789, Dr. Timothy Hosmer, Isaiah Thomas, William Wadsworth, Thomas Lewis and William Judd, all of Hartford, Connecticut purchased this area, which was then also called Hartford. With a main trail across New York State, Gilbert Berry settled at the popular river crossing, establishing a rope ferry, store and tavern to serve the settlers moving west. In 1794, funds were appropriated to upgrade this trail to a major road, eventually becoming known as U.S. Route 20 and N.Y. 5. Hartford was then renamed Avon in 1808.

With the fertile farmland and discovery of mineral springs in 1821, Avon quickly grew. Places of worship were being built to accommodate the religious needs of Avon residents, among them the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Avon, as it was then known.

On March 17, 1834 Jonathan Benson and Benjamin Smith were elected to preside at an organizational meeting for the "The Second Society of The Methodist Episcopal Church In The Town of Avon". During the first six years the Methodists met in an old school house on Prospect Street. A storm took the roof off that building, forcing the congregation to worship in homes until 1839 when a wooden building was erected on the premises occupied by the present brick church. The land for the church was purchased from the Wadsworth family of Geneseo for one dollar. With James Austin as the architect and Chester Pratt the builder, the wooden building was completed at a total cost of two thousand dollars.

Architect James Cutler of Rochester was hired to design the present brick church. The construction, sublet to Lang and Watkins, started in 1879 and was finished in 1880 for a cost of nine thousand dollars. The original wooden church was moved to the rear of the lot while the new church was constructed. The bricks for the church were made at the Avon Brick Company, located on the east side of the Genesee River.



Architect James Goold Cutler,
courtesy of Wikipedia

James Cutler, the building's architect, was a prominent figure in the region, particularly in his home city of Rochester. Cutler was born in 1848 in Albany, N.Y., where his father and grandfather were the proprietors of a carriage-making factory. After moving to Rochester and gaining architectural training and experience as a draftsman, he set up his own office in 1872. Until the mid-1890s, he practiced architecture and designed a variety of buildings including factories, private homes and commercial buildings, including the Cutler Building in downtown Rochester. Cutler was the inventor of the mail chute for office buildings, patented in 1883. For three years, he served as president of the State Association of Architects. After retiring from architectural practice, Cutler served on the Rochester Commission of Public Safety between 1900 and 1903, when he was elected mayor for one two-year term. In his later years, he devoted his time to banking interests and the management of the Cutler Mail Chute Company. He died in Rochester in 1927.

Cutler's plan for the building placed both the worship space and the attendant fellowship and education facilities on two floors under one roof, thereby economizing on initial construction costs for excavation and roofing and long-term maintenance expenses for the roof. Although constructed of brick, the building is embellished with asymmetrical corner towers, rock-faced brownstone trim, round-arched openings, corbelling and a Romanesque rose window that evoke the appearance of the then-emerging Richardsonian Romanesque style.

The Avon Methodist Episcopal Church remains largely as it was when completed in 1880, especially in its principal worship space, retaining its original non-figural stained glass windows, natural oak pews, pulpit/altar dais, simple plaster mouldings and tongue-in-groove wainscot. Also of note is the relatively rare

Felgemaker tracker-action organ given to the congregation by Mrs. Alva Carpenter and installed in the 1895. The instrument draws organ historians and enthusiasts from a wide area to view and play it. Several years ago the congregation raised thirty thousand dollars to have the organ completely restored. This church continues to serve an active congregation that has carefully maintained its historic appearance for over 100 years.

Source: National Register of Historic Places application, prepared by Robert Englert, Historic Preservation Program Analyst for NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, 2004

Sources used by Robert Englert:

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