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Old church made way for federals

(Editor's note: This is the first in a series of "then and now" articles on places and things of interest in Kansas City, Kan., compiled by area historian Margaret Landis in observance of the 100th birthday of KCK in 1986. Much of the information has appeared in past editions of The Kansan.)

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

The old Central Christian Church, 7th Street between Armstrong and Ann, merged with the Temple Church congregation in 1939 to allow the site to be used for a new Federal Building.

The new Central Christian Church was built during the 1940s at 18th and Washington Boulevard. It presents an outstanding example of modern Gothic style of ecclesiastical architecture of a design that especially meets the needs of a church of the Disciples of Christ denomination.

The exterior of the building is of native stone which was quarried in hills near the city.

A wealth of color is used in the interior decorations, not only in the "jeweled" windows, but in the great timber trusses as well. Swinging from the roof timbers are especially designed modern lanterns. The plastered walls of the nave are a soft venetian rose, and the woodwork of the ceiling is stained a soft gray tan. The chancel decoration is carried out in soft tints of blue and bronze.

The architects of the building were Felt & Kriehn, Kansas City, Mo. They worked with A.F. Wickes, general church architect for Christian church in the United States, with headquarters at Indianapolis and with the late Daniel F. Cross, pastor of the church in working out the design which is embodied in the building.

After a 22-year wait, Kansas City, Kan., finally got its new federal building in 1959.



(top) An old postcard shows the Central Christian Church as it appeared on 7th Street between Armstrong and Ann. (bottom) The Federal Building now occupies the site of the old Central Christian Church.

The \$2 million structure on 7th Street between Armstrong and Ann, previously the site of Central Christian Church, was completed early in the fall of 1959. The first of the more than 30 governmental agencies that occupy it started moving in early in November.

By the end of the year, all but two of the tenants had moved to their new quarter. On Jan. 1, 1960, the old Civic Center post office at 7th and Minnesota, was closed for the final time. The following Monday, the new Civic Center station was opened in the new federal building.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture meat inspection laboratory remained in the old post office building at 7th and Minnesota for another two or three weeks because there was a large amount of new and specialized equipment that had to be installed in the laboratory.

KCK started its drive for a new federal building in the early 30s. In 1935, the government authorized the building and the following year, authorization was received to start acquiring the land where the building now stands.

Then came a series of delays, until plans for the new Federal building were scrapped for the duration of World War II.

With war's end, local leaders immediately renewed their drive for the Federal building. And then came the Korean War. After the truce in Korea, demands for a new federal building were again renewed.

Finally in 1956, plans for the building again received federal approval. But when the bids were opened Dec. 11 only one was received and it was rejected.

On Feb. 12, 1958, a bid by Universal Construction Co. to build the new structure was approved in Washington, D.C. The following month, a steel wrecking ball crashed against the old telephone exchange building at 711 Armstrong and the project was at last under way.

The Federal building, designed by Joseph Radotinsky, local architect, is two stories high on the north end and four stories high on the south. Because of the terrain, it has two ground floor entrance. One from Armstrong leads to the postal station, the other, a floor higher, leads onto 7th Street.

The building contains two large U.S. District courtrooms, exactly alike, and a smaller magistrate courtroom. All agencies connected with the U.S. District Court are on the first floor, which is on the 7th Street entrance level. The bankruptcy courtroom and facilities and the marshal's and probation offices are on the ground floor with the post office.

The second floor includes the office of U.S. Rep. Jan Meyers, the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Bureau and the Drug Enforcement Administration. The third floor is given over to the Internal Revenue Service and the fourth floor houses the U.S. attorney's and the public defender's offices.

Dedication of the building was Feb. 12, 1960. It consisted of the unveiling of the time capsule-bearing cornerstone on which are inscribed the words, "Dwight D. Eisenhower, President, 1958."

The stone is in the wall west of the north ground floor entrance to the Civic center post office. The time capsule bearing memorabilia of 1960, was sealed behind the marble facing on the wall on Feb. 10.