

The Old Stone Church

Contributed by Administrator
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The distinctive Old Stone Church, gleaming in the sun on its small island of green, looks serenely down on modern urbanized Monroeville all around it; a poignant reminder of a simpler times. The church had its beginnings in 1834 when a small group of local people petitioned the Presbyterian Church for a congregation to be established in what is now Monroeville. The trustees purchased land from two early settlers. John Johnston and Joel Monroe deeded parcels of land beside the Johnston's family cemetery on the Northern Turnpike. In the next few years, the members of the Cross Roads congregation built a modest church -- a simple, box-shaped meeting house made of indigenous stone. The first pastor was the Rev. S.M. McClung, whose pay was \$5 a Sunday plus free board for him and his horse. This church was to serve for many years, but by 1894 it was in need of extensive repair, and the congregation decided instead to tear it down and build a newer, bigger church on the same site. Stones from the original church were used in the construction, along with additional stones provided from the nearby Snodgrass quarry. In a few years, the new church was finished, to be dedicated in October, 1897. The second Cross Roads church was to be a much more impressive structure. The box shape had now been expanded by extending two opposite sides to form windowed bays. The result was an octagon-shaped design reminiscent of the Richardsonian Romanesque style then popular in Western Pennsylvania. The front of the eight-sided building was to have twin entrances on either side under hooded roofs, flanking an impressive stained glass window under a concave arched frame. The unique design would be complemented by a steeply-pitched slate roof. For many years this inspiring church on the hill served as a place of worship, but as the automobile came to dominate family life, and parking became a growing problem, it became less practical as a meeting place. The Cross Roads congregation moved on to larger quarters in 1958; in 1963 the building was sold to the Monroeville Church of Christ. In 1969 the church building was again sold, this time to T. M. Sylves and his daughter, Sarah Sylves Thompson who bought it with the intention of giving it to the Municipality and the Monroeville Historical Society so that the building might be preserved as an historical landmark. In 1970, the transfer was made and the Old Stone Church was subsequently awarded Landmark status by the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation. In 1976, as part of the nation's bicentennial celebrations, a bell tower was erected beside the church and dedicated to two industrial pioneers who had a significant impact on the area: George Westinghouse and Nicola Tesla. Today, the Old Stone Church is under the care of the Monroeville Historical Society which opens it for tours on special occasions, and provides arrangements for private weddings to be held there. Interested parties may call 412-856-1000 for information. Note: Information on the history of the Old Stone Church was contributed by Paul Damon, Kathy Chengery, and the Cross Roads Presbyterian Church.