

**THE BABCOCK CHAPEL  
(Reuben Babcock, 1830 to 1909)**

**by Gary Morfitt**



The Babcock Chapel of the United Methodist Church at Absecon turned 100 years old in 2002. This chapel is part of the overall church complex and is situated on the corner next to Pitney Road facing Church Street (see photo). It is open every day from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. for prayer.

The building that is referred to as the Babcock Chapel was built in 1902 by Reuben Babcock. “Electricity was added (to the sanctuary) in 1902 and that same year, Reuben Babcock, a loyal member and lay preacher, presented the congregation with a chapel erected on the corner of Church Street and Pitney Road. After his death in 1909, his widow, Hannah Elizabeth Babcock, enlarged the chapel to include a primary department and kitchen.”<sup>1</sup> The main purpose of the original building was to house Sunday School classes and to be a place for church functions. This original building consisted of what is now the church office, the Allen Room and the small chapel.

Reuben was a very active leading member of the church. For many years he served as lay preacher, missionary society steward, official board member, trustee and assistant Sunday School superintendent. His gift to our church has been a valuable one indeed and on this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death we owe him a special note of gratitude.



In 1902, the church complex looked very different than today. Neither the Christian Center (built in 1935), the Memorial Room (built in the 1950's), nor the Children's Building (built in 1964) existed. Many decades later, the Great Hall and Sanctuary expansions were completed in 2002.

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<sup>1</sup> *Along Absecon Creek, a History of Early Absecon, New Jersey* by Sarah W.R. Ewing and Robert McMullin., page 187

The Sanctuary at this time was a stand-alone building. Next to the Sanctuary was a parsonage (built in 1870 and demolished in 1952). When the Babcock building was built in 1902, it was another free-standing building.



Under Rev. James McGowan, the building was remodeled. The Lamp Lighter Library was the first room next to Church Street. The choir practiced in the second room, and the small chapel, then called the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, was closest to the current Senior Pastor's office. The congregation could always count on Laura Allen because every Sunday she would stand at the front of the library to encourage people to use it. There was a picture on a podium in the library of Jesus carrying a lamp. This painting, called "The Lamp Lighter," was done by Mae Townsend and is still on display in the Allen Room.

The Chapel of the Good Shepherd was dedicated Sunday, September 29, 1968. The Chapel derived its name from the two stained glass windows, "The Light of the World Window," depicting the seeking shepherd, and "The Good Shepherd Window," illustrating the saving shepherd. The stained glass windows that were in this chapel were moved and are now in the current small chapel. All three rooms had low ceilings because of concerns about heating and cooling.

In 1990, the church needed to use its rooms more efficiently. Many felt that the secretary's office was difficult to find because it was located in the current Assistant Pastor's office. The library was infrequently used, and the small chapel was not being used to its full potential. An undesirable amount of traffic flowed through the chapel with the library and choir room on one side and the Senior Pastor's office on the other.



It was at this time that the choir room was moved to its current location (Room U106). The rooms in the building were then organized into their current configuration with the chapel closest to Church Street, then the Allen Room (which doubles as a meeting room and a library), and finally the church office.

(One of the surprising finds during this remodeling of the current small chapel was the beautiful ceilings that were uncovered above the false ceilings.)