

# Historic Designation Report

## East View United Church of Christ 17300 Van Aken Boulevard Shaker Heights, OH



*Figure 1: 17300 Van Aken Boulevard, Shaker Heights, Ohio (c. 2023); photo by  
Cleveland Restoration Society Staff*

General:

Built:	1940
Architect:	Junior W. Everhard
Style:	Neoclassical
Builder:	The Mitzel Company
Original construction cost:	\$75,000
Permanent Parcel Number:	735-18-016

Structural:

Exterior Walls:	Brick
Roof:	Clay Tile partial flat roof on addition
Stories:	2 with attic and basement
Size:	Approx. 46,200 sq. ft.
Additions:	1940- Brick sanctuary added to 1934 wood frame bldg 1952- Education wing and tower (demo of frame bldg) 1960- Final addition, 3 floor nursery and reception room
Heating:	Forced Air

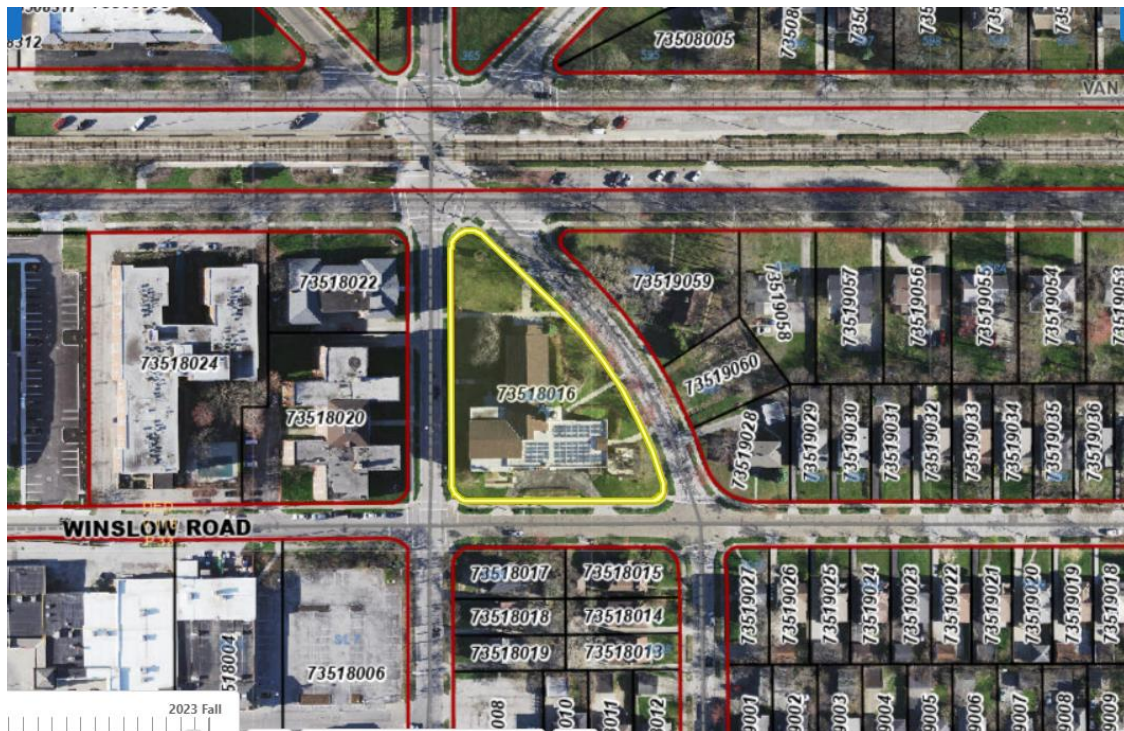


Figure 2: Location map for 17300 Van Aken Boulevard, image from Cuyahoga County GIS

## HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE: SUMMARY

The former Heights Christian Church, now home to East View United Church of Christ was constructed in four phases over a period of nearly 30 years, beginning during the Great Depression, by a persistent congregation. The building increased in size to pair with the growth of the church over time, which was planned from the start by architect Junior W. Everhard. Everhard designed the church in the Neoclassical style. The sizeable brick building, which occupies an entire 'island' block between three streets, features prominent classical characteristics and details in white, such as a front portico with four Tuscan columns, Palladian windows lining the sanctuary, and a large tower at the rear corner of the sanctuary.

In the late 1950's into the 60's, church leadership and a small number of congregants became interested in Civil Rights issues, particularly the Cleveland mayoral campaign of Carl Stokes, and local housing integration issues that Shaker Heights was facing. Some church members were able to organize a visit from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., during a visit to Cleveland in 1965. Dr. King's appearance at the church was only his second appearance in a Cleveland suburb. It drew major opposition from a large faction of the Heights congregation. On July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1965, Dr. King spoke on the church porch, unwelcome inside the sanctuary, to a crowd of thousands. His visit to the church has impacted the legacy of not only the church, but also the Shaker Heights community, and its value in a diverse community.

## ARCHITECTURE & DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH

The church at 17300 Van Aken Boulevard in Shaker Heights was constructed by Heights Christian Church. The congregation was founded over a decade prior in 1929, when they held their first service of worship on October 20th in what was Shaker Heights Junior High School (now Woodbury Upper Elementary School). The majority of the initial 65 members came from Euclid Avenue Christian Church.<sup>1</sup> At that first service, Dr. Jacob H. Goldner of Euclid Avenue Christian Church served as preacher. Soon after, Dr. Arthur J. Culler assumed the position of pastor, on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1930.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Culler continued to lead the church through the construction of the existing sanctuary, until retiring in 1945.<sup>3</sup>

As the congregation grew in the following years, they continued to worship in borrowed space. In May 1931, amid the Great Depression, the church held a fundraiser to secure a site and begin construction of their own building. Church leadership realized that it would be impossible to construct the building of the size they wanted due to economic conditions, so the decision was made to pursue construction in a three-phase program.<sup>4</sup> For the first phase, they successfully

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<sup>1</sup> O.M. Walton, "Beat Depression, Church Has Home," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH), April 15, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> "Heights Christian to Expand Church," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH), Oct. 13, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> "Dr. Arthur J. Culler," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH), Nov. 29, 1946.

<sup>4</sup> Heights Christian Church, *Reflections on Our 'Golden Years': Heights Christian Church 1929-1979*, (Heights Christian Church, 1979), 9.

raised \$37,500.<sup>5</sup> In November 1934 the church dedicated a temporary structure on the site of the current building at the corner of Moreland Boulevard (changed to Van Aken in 1951<sup>6</sup>) and Avalon Road. This building was designed by architect Junior W. Everhard (Figures 5 & 6) and was designed as a temporary building from the start. It was a wood frame, colonial style building and painted white with green trim to fit in with the surrounding residential district. The church intended for the foundation and basement to be permanent, but for the superstructure to be eventually removed for expansion. The cost of construction and landscaping for this original building was estimated at \$20,000, and work was completed by contractor C.S. Steininger.<sup>7</sup>

This original building consisted of an auditorium to seat 375, a dining room, kitchen, pastor's office, and an education space, called the 'Assembly Room'. The Assembly Room portion of the building, detailed in Everhard's drawing (Figure 4), consisted of a central "S.S (Sunday School) Assembly Room", with the North, South, and East portions curtained off to designate classrooms; the North side the Intermediate Department, the South side the Junior Department, and the East side the Beginners and Primary Departments. The West side of this wing held the kitchen and an entryway with stairwell.

Architect Junior W. Everhard practiced in Northeast Ohio from the mid-1920's to the late 1950's. He is known for his work at Hiram College, his alma mater, having designed both the Gymnasium and the men's Dormitory, in 1935 and 1940, respectively. He also designed other residences, Towslee School in Brunswick, and an addition for Triumph the Church in Cleveland. Heights Christian Church is his only known work in Shaker Heights.<sup>8</sup>

By 1939, Heights Christian Church began another fundraiser to raise \$30,000 for a new church sanctuary, and just a year later the addition was complete. In 1940, Heights Christian Church was able to dedicate the completed church sanctuary, also designed by J.W. Everhard, and built by the Mitzel Company for a cost of \$75,000. This wing of the building was designed in neoclassical style, made of brick with stone trim featuring a prominent front entry with classical pillars and portico. On the interior, the sanctuary could seat 500 and featured semi-indirect lighting, acoustic treatment, and concealed radiators. Below the sanctuary, the new basement held a dining room, kitchen, and parlor areas.<sup>9</sup> The existing building was remodeled and divided into smaller chapels and classrooms, although it appears that it remained a wood frame structure. At the time of construction, the church already had plans for another eventual education wing addition.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Walton.

<sup>6</sup> Shaker Heights Public Library, *75 Years: An Informal History of Shaker Heights*, ed. David G Molyneaux and Sue Sackman (Shaker Heights Public Library, 1987), 71.

<sup>7</sup> "Shaker Church Started," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH), Nov. 26, 1933.

<sup>8</sup> "Junior W Everhard," Cleveland Architects Database, City of Cleveland, 2024.

[https://planning.clevelandohio.gov/landmark/arch/archDetail.php?afil=&archID=79&pageNum\\_rsArchitects=3&totalRows\\_rsArchitects=438](https://planning.clevelandohio.gov/landmark/arch/archDetail.php?afil=&archID=79&pageNum_rsArchitects=3&totalRows_rsArchitects=438)

<sup>9</sup> "New Heights Christian Church Contract Let," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH), March 29, 1940.

<sup>10</sup> "Heights Christian to Expand Church."



Following Dr. Arthur J. Culler's retirement in 1945, Rev. Waymon Parsons was installed as minister.<sup>11</sup> In 1952, the church expanded with the construction of a \$200,000 education wing and tower, which was also designed by Everhard. Ground for this addition was broken in July of 1951, and involved demolition of the original frame church building that remained. This addition included "13 classrooms, offices, a library, a chapel, and a basement with four bowling alleys, lounge rooms with a snack bar and the heating plant".<sup>12</sup> The new education wing was reflective of, and intended to house the church's extensive programming and large congregation at that time, and was called by the Plain Dealer "one of the most functional units of its kind in Greater Cleveland."<sup>13</sup>

Finally, in 1960, the building was expanded to its present size with another addition- a three floor structure on the Southwest corner that included "a permanent home for the church's day nursery on the first floor, a large reception room on the second floor and a crib room and additional facilities for small children on the third floor."<sup>14</sup> (Figures 8, 9, and 10) The church pipe organ was dedicated that same year, installed as part of the recently completed building expansion project.<sup>15</sup> Just a couple years later, Pastor Waymon Parsons and his wife were killed in a car crash.<sup>16</sup> Soon after, in 1963, a new pastor was installed in his place, the Reverend Albert M. Pennybacker.<sup>17</sup>

## **CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISM & DR. KING'S VISIT**

In the late 1950's and early 60's, the national Civil Rights movement was well underway, and Cleveland began to enter its own struggle for Civil Rights. In Shaker Heights, housing integration became a major issue. Racist blockbusting practices led to the proliferation of Black homeownership in the primarily white Ludlow community. New Black homeowners were met with violence, both covert and overt, culminating in 1956 with the bombing of John and Dorothy Pegg's home.<sup>18</sup> While that incident led to the establishment of the Ludlow Community Association, Heights Christian Church, a largely white congregation, was also making efforts to welcome new residents into the Shaker Heights neighborhood. Reverend Pennybacker, church members Dr. Joan Campbell, her husband Paul Campbell, and others were looking for ways to engage more deeply in Civil Rights activism. In the mid-1960's, they began to look towards the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., as well as Carl Stokes and his campaign to become Cleveland mayor.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Heights Church to Install," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH), February 3, 1945.

<sup>12</sup> "Christian Church to Start Addition," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH) June 30, 1951.

<sup>13</sup> "Flock will Plant New Lawn Today," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH) August 23, 1952.

<sup>14</sup> "Shaker Church Completes Building It Started in 1933," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH) April 9, 1960.

<sup>15</sup> "Heights Church Dedicates Organ," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH) June 11, 1960.

<sup>16</sup> "Auto Crash That Killed Pastor Fatal to Mrs. Waymon Parsons," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH) June 13, 1962.

<sup>17</sup> "New Ministers Called to Protestant Pulpits," Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH) April 13, 1963.

<sup>18</sup> "Ludlow Community Association," Cleveland Civil Rights Trail, Cleveland Restoration Society, 2024, <https://clevelandcivilrightstrail.org/explore-the-trail/ludlow-community-association/>.

<sup>19</sup> "Conversations in Courage: The Visit," directed by Shaker Arts Council (2019; Shaker Heights, OH), mp4.

Dr. King visited Cleveland many times throughout the 1960's. While in Cleveland, he spoke with diverse groups to garner support, raise money, and organize for a variety of Civil Rights causes, including Carl Stokes' campaign to become the first Black mayor of a major American city. At the time, Dr. King was a divisive figure; among white communities, but also to a degree within some Black communities as well.<sup>20</sup>

When Dr. King planned to come to Cleveland in July of 1965, his goal was to support Carl Stokes' first mayoral run and encourage people to get out the vote. At Heights Christian Church, supporters of Civil Rights and Dr. King saw this as an opportunity to invite Dr. King to speak in their community. They knew that the Civil Rights groups in which Dr. King was involved were looking to raise money and thought it would be helpful to arrange a fundraising luncheon.<sup>21</sup> In an interview, Rev. Pennybacker explained, "And so we found a way to be involved in the specifics of Carl Stokes' campaign to become mayor. And that was the linkage with Dr. King, but it was also the context in which we felt we could move and felt we could welcome him here."<sup>22</sup>

Dr. Joan and Paul Campbell led arrangements for Dr. King to speak at the church. To bolster community support and to encourage Dr. King to accept their invitation, Heights Christian Church partnered with the nearby Christ Episcopal Church on Warrensville Center Road. Christ Episcopal agreed to host the fundraising luncheon to follow an address by Dr. King at Heights Christian Church. This would be the second time that Dr. King had spoken to a group in a Cleveland suburb, the first being at St. Paul Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights in 1963.<sup>23</sup> Many members of Heights Christian Church were deeply opposed to Dr. King visiting. In anticipation of King's arrival, members of the Heights congregation threatened to leave the church. Some also tried to sabotage the event by removing the pews from the sanctuary prior to the visit on the pretext of remodeling. Bomb sniffing dogs and the police were needed to protect against bomb threats directed at the church and the Campbell family. Despite the controversy, Campbells and other advocates in the church were determined for King to successfully speak to their audience. Arrangements were made for Dr. King to speak from the church porch, rather than inside the sanctuary.<sup>24</sup>

That day, July 28<sup>th</sup> 1965, King came from an event in Cleveland's Garden Valley neighborhood, escorted by Cleveland and Shaker Heights police.<sup>25</sup> When he arrived at Heights Christian Church, he spoke from the Northwest porch (constructed in the 1960 addition) to a diverse crowd that would have been too large to fit inside the sanctuary. Thousands filled the yard, tree lawn, and street to listen to Dr. King speak. Pickets were present as well, walking up and

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<sup>20</sup> "Conversations in Courage: The Visit."

<sup>21</sup> "Conversations in Courage: The Visit."

<sup>22</sup> "Conversations in Courage: The Visit."

<sup>23</sup> "Martin Luther King Jr., Visits to Cleveland," Encyclopedia of Cleveland History, Case Western Reserve University, 2024, <https://case.edu/ech/articles/m/martin-luther-king-jr-visits-cleveland#:~:text=King%20was%20a%20regular%20visitor,%2C%20and%20encouraged%20self%2Drespect>.

<sup>24</sup> "Conversations in Courage: The Visit."

<sup>25</sup> "Dr. King to emphasize the Power of the Ballot," Call and Post (Cleveland, OH) July 24, 1965.

down the sidewalk carrying racist signs. According to Dr. Joan Campbell, “It was quite a miracle, actually, that he was even able to speak out on the front porch of the church. And so in the long run, it was a witness to all that was right and good. And he was, of course, Martin Luther King, who gave a brilliant speech and I think we’d have never had the mix that was outside of this church had it been inside at that point.”<sup>2627</sup>

Even after Dr. King’s visit, the church faced repercussions from members of the congregation who had not wanted King to be there. A significant portion of church members left the congregation, and Rev. Pennybacker faced backlash from some other elders and leaders of the church. However, past and current church leaders recall that the event had long-lasting positive implications for the congregation, including improving the church’s community outreach efforts. According to Reverend Roger Osgood, pastor of Heights Christian Church from 2006 until his retirement in 2022, “On the positive side, I believe it’s shaped the congregation to be a congregation that is more inclusive, more concerned about social justice issues, and that continues.”<sup>28</sup>

Heights Christian Church continued to occupy the building On Van Aken Boulevard until December 2021, when they sold it to East View United Church of Christ. East View moved to the site from their longtime location nearby at 15615 Chagrin Boulevard.

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<sup>26</sup> “Conversations in Courage: The Visit.”

<sup>27</sup> The following video clips show the event that day:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEMNBidBTac>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsVRKOkECKc&t=8s>

<sup>28</sup> “Conversations in Courage: The Visit.”

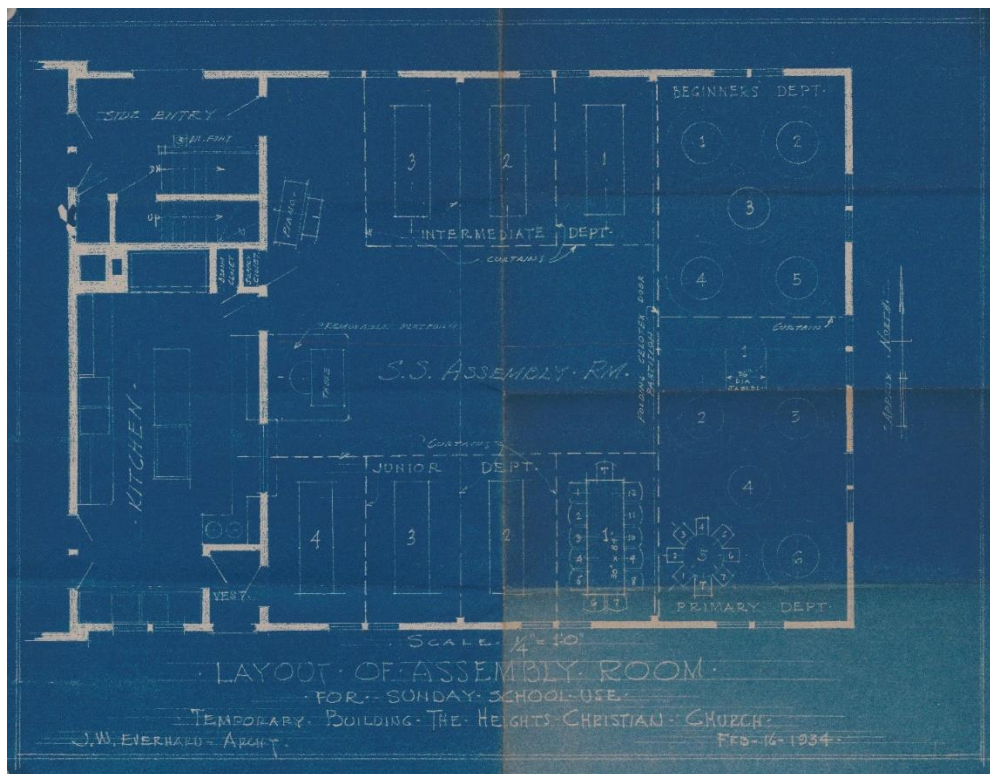


Figure 3: Portion of temporary 1934 Structure, Heights Christian Church

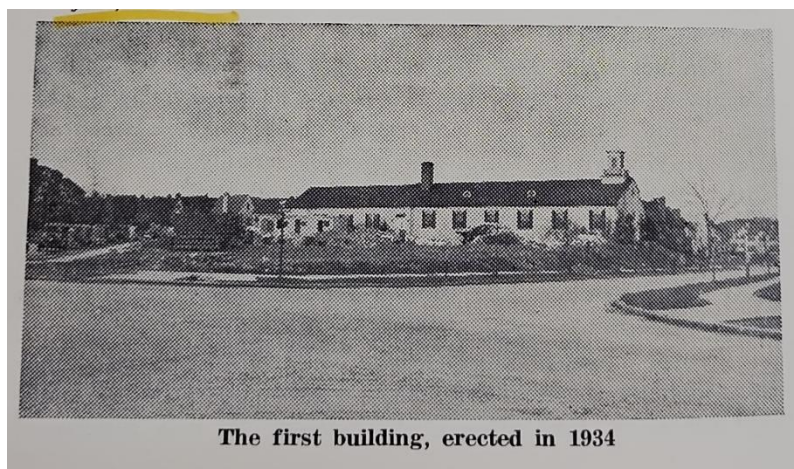


Figure 4: Photograph of temporary 1934 church structure, published in A Charter Member's Notes on the History of Heights Christian Church by Felix S. Hales, February 1971.



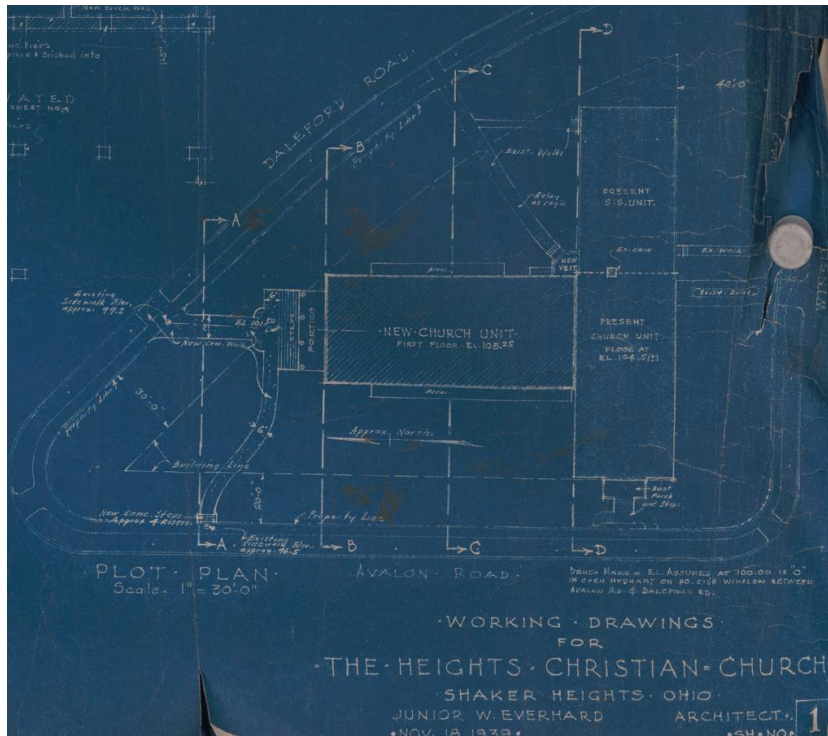


Figure 5: November 18, 1939 site plan

## New Heights Christian Church Contract Let

ARCHITECT'S DRAWING OF \$75,000 EDIFICE

Ground will be broken next week for the new Heights Christian Church at South Moreland Boulevard and Avalon Road, Shaker Heights, of which Dr. A. J. Culler is pastor. The contract for the \$75,000 structure was awarded last night to the Mitzel Co.

Junior W. Everhard, architect, has designed the building in New England and colonial style to be executed in brick with stone trim. A pillared portico will face the boulevard. The auditorium, to seat 500, will be without pillars. The sanctuary will have semi-indirect lighting and high windows and will be acoustically treated and have concealed radiators.

In the basement will be a dining room to seat 350 at tables and 400 otherwise. On that level also will be a kitchen and parlors. The temporary building, occupied since 1934, will be divided into small chapels and class rooms. The work is expected to be completed in early autumn.

### POTTS WILL JUMP GUN IN CAMPAIGN

Opens Sheriff Race Wednesday in Foes' Absence

BY RALPH KELLY

Emmet J. Potts, former police captain and candidate for the Republican nomination for sheriff, has decided to get the jump on all Republican candidates by opening his campaign officially while the main body of the organization is in Columbus whooping it up for United States Senator Robert A. Taft. noli-

### City Truckers' Pay Ordinance Signed

Following a conference late yesterday with John Rohrich, vice president of the Teamsters District Council, Mayor Harold H. Burton signed the legislation passed last week by the City Council setting the pay rate for all city truck drivers at 95 cents an hour.

The ordinance becomes effective Monday and remains in effect until the Council adopts the new wage and salary schedules now before it.

The mayor said his meeting with Rohrich, also attended by Service Director Miles E. Evans and Park Director Hugo E. Varga, was held

gottiators are to meet again today, and the belief was general that there was no immediate danger of a strike.

Figure 6: March 1940 Plain Dealer article on church expansion



Figure 7: Cornerstone being laid for the new sanctuary of Heights Christian Church, 1940. Shaker Heights Public Library.

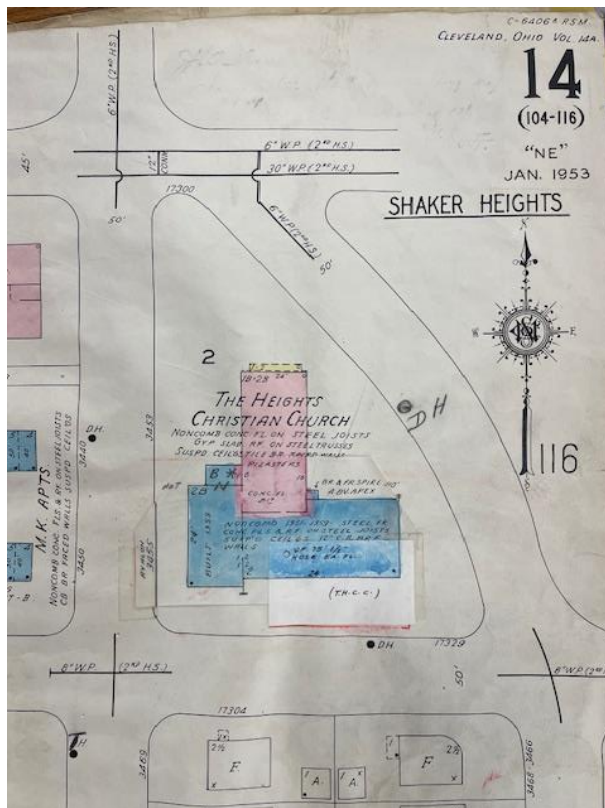


Figure 8: January 1953 Plat Map, showing Heights Christian Church with its 1952 Education Wing Addition, and modified to show the 1960 Nursery and Recreation Room Addition, Shaker Heights Public Library.



Figure 9: 1959 Architect Rendering of the final addition for Heights Christian Church. Shaker Heights Public Library.



Figure 10: 1960 image of Heights Christian Church, following construction of its final addition. Shaker Heights Public Library.





*Figure 11: The audience for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. outside the porch of Heights Christian Church on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1965, "Conversations in Courage: The Visit," Shaker Arts Council.*



*Figure 12: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speaking on the porch of Heights Christian Church on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1965, "Conversations in Courage: The Visit," Shaker Arts Council.*