

History of the First Church of Christ Scientist Fairmont, Minnesota

The Red Rock Center for the Arts is a restored 1898 red stone building that is on the National Register of Historic Places. Here is its background. It was written before the restoration.

In 1888, illness struck two prominent Fairmont families who were successfully treated by a Christian Scientist Practitioner from Iowa. Phoebe Haines, whose prayers apparently healed these family members, inspired a group of wealthy residents to form a Christian Science study in Fairmont. A key element of this religious movement is total reliance on spiritual healing.

The church was formally organized in Fairmont on October 1, 1891 with 12 charter members. There were 25 members on the roll during its first years. According to their early records, "many chronic diseases were healed." In September, 1897 the church purchased property for a permanent location and started building the following Spring. It was constructed just 19 years after the denomination's founding in Boston, Massachusetts by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879.

The First Church of Christ Scientist in Fairmont is located at 222 Blue Earth Avenue at the southwest corner of Blue Earth Avenue and Elm Street. This church, finished in 1898, is an excellent example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. It was designed by prominent Minneapolis architect Harry W. Jones, apparently with assistance from parishioner Frank R. Wade of Sheldon, Iowa.

The 45' by 65' building was constructed of massive rock faced Sioux quartzite blocks which were quarried near Pipestone. The red stone was combined with contrasting buff colored rock faced limestone for a polychromatic effect. The nearly square building has a steep hipped roof with short intersecting gables on the north, west, and east facades. Within each gable is a group of three small rounded arched stained glass windows. The gable on the main (north) facade has stone piers flanking the windows and a date stone at the top. Beneath this gable is the main entrance to the church, recessed behind a pointed arch with buff colored stone voussoir. The double main entrance doors are set beneath a rounded, arched stained glass transom within the entrance alcove. Flanking the main entrance and repeated on the side and rear walls, are pairs of tall rounded arched windows filled with stained glass. The church is further ornamented with square stone piers which project above the corners of the building, have corbels at the eaves, and a contrasting stone watertable, foundation, and belt courses at the sill and springing block levers. The building has a tall brick chimney rising above the west side wall. There is a full basement underneath.

The cornerstone came from Concord, New Hampshire and contains many artifacts of Christian Science teachings and the local church's history.

To quote the May 25, 1900 Fairmont Sentinel, "The building is the first stone edifice in Fairmont as well as being the most substantial and expensive. It has been erected at a cost, including the lot, of \$9,000 and is a credit to its builders as well as an ornament to the city."

In 1937 the church changed hands when it was purchased by the Christian Church of Fairmont. That congregation worshiped in this location until 1988. It was then bought by Mr. Don Graville who operated a "Rummage House" there until 1994 when it was put up for auction. Mr. Larry Vogel purchased it for \$15,250 with the hopes it could be saved and restored. Due to a lack of funding, this once proud building now stands nearly in ruins with pressure from the city and irate neighbors to have it torn down.

This magnificent structure holds a special place in our town's history and it is architecturally unique among churches in Southern Minnesota. It is listed on the National Register of Historical Places and has been recognized by the Minnesota Preservation Alliance. It is one of Fairmont's few remaining historical treasures. Many in our community are saddened and perplexed by its rapidly deteriorating condition and would dearly love to see it saved and restored to its former grandeur and given new life and meaning for a new century.

We hope that people can once again fill this building replacing the pigeons who have been occupying it for far too long. Fairmont is a hard working, resourceful community. Its citizens take pride in its past and have great hope for its future. The Martin County Preservation Association fervently believes this church should be a part of that future and that it is worthy of all our best efforts.

The hopes of the citizens were fulfilled.

The building sat empty until Don Milbrandt and the Martin County Preservation Association (MCPA), along with Martin County, made plans to save the building. After years of volunteer labor, the restored building was dedicated in 2005. The MCPA now operates the building as the Red Rock Community Arts Center for visual and performing arts.