

## HISTORY

First United Methodist Church  
Springfield, Illinois

The Washington Street Mission 1909-1910

Church people of Springfield, have for years been interested in the background welfare of the Washington Street Mission. This Mission is a direct outgrowth of the Billy Sunday revival services of 1909. Its history and that of First United Methodist Church are closely intertwined.

We recently talked with Mrs. Mary Louisa Brown Miller, now the guiding genius of this Christian work, the daughter of Robert T. Brown. She literally grew up in the Mission. Mrs. Miller states her father Robert T. Brown, was a convert of the Billy Sunday revival services that ended on Easter Sunday, 1909. He was then the secretary-treasurer of the Vredenburg Lumber Company. After his conversion, he was invited by Mr. George E. Coe, then a city commissioner, to join a prayer group that met during noon hours for Bible study and discussion.

At one of these group sessions Mr. Coe stated: "We have been praying for something spiritual for Springfield,.Here is \$500.00. Now let's DO something about it".

With this initial gift, the group began the planning and organization that resulted in the formation of a Rescue Mission, which opened its doors January 10, 1910 at 819 East Washington Street. Soon the work outgrew the building and after four different locations the Rescue Mission purchased the present building at 111 South 8th Street, in May, 1918. The name "Washington Street Mission" is found in a record book of the minutes of the Board for 1914.

There have been four Superintendents of the Mission. Mr. John Astra served while Mr. Brown was President of the Board. When Mr. Astra resigned we note that Mr. Robert Brown resigned his position at the Vredenburg Lumber Company in 1919 to devote his entire time to the Mission, which he served until his death in 1940. At that time Mr. Robert O. Miller, a son-in-law who had been active in the work of the Mission, was appointed to the post of Superintendent, which he held to the time of his death, April 28, 1970. Since then, Mrs. Miller has continued the work of the Mission.

R.R.M.