

The Promising Arrival of the Reverend John McClary Steele



Following the resignation of Third Presbyterian Church's first minister, Rev. Dr. William H. Marble, the congregation called a young New Englander, just 36 years old, to its pulpit. Rev. John McClary Steele, a graduate of Dartmouth College (1844) and Andover Theological Seminary (1847), arrived in Columbus in September 1856. Shortly after his arrival, the church unanimously voted to change its name to the "First Congregational Church of Columbus." The energetic young minister quickly won the affection and esteem of the growing congregation. Due to this growth, on February 25, 1857, the church membership approved a motion to relocate from its original site at Lynn Alley and Third Street to a lot facing Capitol Square on Broad Street. *[Editor's Note: The church remained at that location—74 E. Broad Street—until December 1931, when the current neo-Gothic structure was opened for services.]*

Soon after the purchase of the new lot facing Capital Square, the young Rev. Steele set off on a trip East to help in the efforts of raising the projected \$7,000 cost of a new Norman-style building (see image below). In a tragic turn of events, Rev. Steele contracted smallpox on the journey and died on April 5, 1857 in New York City, five short months after this installation.

The grief-stricken congregation determined to move bravely forward with their building plans, and the new structure was dedicated in December 1857. In an account written by Mrs. Abram Brown, titled "History of the First Congregational Church of Columbus" and published in *Ohio Church Society Papers*, Volume 8 (1898), she reports:

It [the building] was 63x120 feet and stood upon the present site [74 E. Broad Street]. Two large social rooms with a middle hall occupied the front of the building, and above these was the Sunday School room. The audience room was 59x73 feet. The outer vestibule was in a projecting middle tower; above this vestibule was the pastor's study. The entire cost of the lot and building was about \$17,000.



Watercolor by Ralph Fanning (currently on display in the Church Parlor)

First Congregational Church 73 East Broad Street -
Photo Credit: Jeff McCutcheon