***Site of the Church in the Wilderness
Near 22nd & Washington Boulevard, 1844-1847***

The Wyandot Indians brought a Methodist church organization with them when they came to Kansas from Ohio in 1843. The church had its beginnings in the missionary efforts of a lay preacher named John Stewart, a freeborn black man who had arrived among the Wyandots in 1816. Impressed by his eloquence, the chiefs of the tribe petitioned the Methodist Episcopal Church to grant Stewart a license and aid in building a school. A mission church was erected in 1824 at Upper Sandusky, Ohio - the first Methodist mission in North America - and the church played an increasingly important role in the lives and history of the Wyandots.

John Stewart died in 1823, shortly before the completion of the mission building, but his work lived after him. By the time the Wyandots came to Kansas there were some two hundred church members in a total Wyandot population of less than seven hundred. As the membership roll would not include minor dependents, it may be assumed that half or more of the Wyandots were affiliated with the church. Moreover, the church membership included many of the most prominent and best educated members of the tribe.

The Rev. James Wheeler was the missionary assigned to the Wyandots at that time. He did not accompany the tribe to Kansas, however, as it was necessary for him to stay behind and see to the proper disposal of the Ohio mission property. In his absence, services were conducted in the open by several lay preachers. An account of the subsequent building of the first church was given by Lucy B. Armstrong in 1870:

"Esquire Grey Eyes, an ordained local preacher, a good speaker, was the most active and zealous of their preachers and exhorters, and though not at all educated, was very useful and influential. At the close of one of the meetings in January 1844, he said to some of the brethren, 'I want to build a meeting house.' Said one, 'You have no house for yourself yet,' for he was living in the camp. 'I want a house for my soul first,' he replied, and he persuaded the men of the nation, whether church or not, to meet together in the woods, cut down trees, hew logs, and haul them to a place near Mr. Kerr's present residence. The United States government had not paid the Wyandots for their homes in Ohio, and they had no money to pay for lumber or work; so they made clapboards for the roof and puncheons for the floor and seats. In the latter part of April we worshipped in the house, the minister standing on a strip of the floor laid at the opposite end of the building from the door, and the people sitting on sleepers not yet covered. On the first Sabbath in June the first quarterly meeting in the territory, for the Wyandots, was held in the house, it being finished. Those were halcyon days. Though we heard no 'the sound of the church bell.' our ears were not pained, nor our hearts grieved by the sound of the axe or gun on the Sabbath. Though our church was rude and the seats uncomfortable, yet they were always well filled with worshippers and God was there."

This rude structure stood in a wooded tract that was two miles from the Wyandot settlement. It thus became known as the Church in the Wilderness.

The log church was used until the Fall of 1847, when a new brick church was erected near the present intersection of 10th and Walker on land donated by John Arms. In the interim, the national Methodist Episcopal Church had split on the issue of slavery, with the proslavery faction seceding to form the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In this division, the Indian Mission Conference to which the Wyandot Church belonged was attached to the South church, as was the missionary, the Rev. E. T. Peery.

Peery was strongly supported by William Walker, Jr., who was not himself a church member. In July 1848, the church board petitioned the Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for a new missionary. The Rev. James Gurley arrived in November, only to be forcibly expelled from the territory by the pro-slavery Indian Agent at the instigation of Walker. The result was the Rev. Peery and his adherents took possession of the new brick church (paid for with money from the sale of the Ohio mission), while a majority of the congregation was forced to meet in members' homes.

In 1850 or '51, a second log church was built by the original congregation on property donated by Lucy B. Armstrong at what is now 38th and Parallel Parkway. Until recently, both congregations were still active in Kansas City, Kansas, though the national split has been healed. The Seventh Street United Methodist Church was descended from the South church, while Trinity United Methodist Church at 5010 Parallel Parkway can claim descent from the church begun by John Stewart in 1816.