

# Nederland Community Presbyterian Church

## A Brief History



The Church just after completion in 1915

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## **A Brief History of Nederland Community Presbyterian Church**

Our church had its beginnings in the years between the Caribou silver boom of the 1870s and the tungsten boom which began around 1910. Nederland at the turn of the century was a tiny crossroads that sat at the West end of a large meadow owned by Hannah Barker. The area's ranches, mines and mills supported the economy. At this time, Eldora was experiencing a small boom from several gold mines and even had connections to Boulder via the Colorado & Northwestern Railroad.

Nederland's postmistress, Mrs. C.M. Edwards, initiated a Sunday School in 1899. The Presbyterian Church assigned William H. Schuremann as a missionary to the area with Mrs. Edwards serving as the Sunday School Superintendent. The Sunday School met in homes, the local school, and the town hall until the church's sanctuary was built.

From 1908 to 1910, Barker Dam and reservoir were created as part of a hydroelectric project by Central Colorado Power Company. A spur of the Colorado & Northwestern Railroad (also known as the Switzerland Trail of America) was built between Eldora and Nederland to supply equipment and materials for the dam. These events coincided with the Nederland tungsten-mining boom that preceded the United States entry into World War I.

Nederland experienced a large influx of workers and their families during the second decade of the twentieth century. It is reported the town's population numbered from 3,000 to 5,000 during the tungsten boom. Tungsten is a material used to harden steel and was in high demand for weapons manufacturing. Naturally, many of the trappings of a more 'civilized' town followed in the wake of the boom times.

The Nederland Presbyterian Church was formally organized on August 19, 1912 with seventeen members. Their minister was Wayne Shoddy who was a student at McCormick Seminary. In 1914, Reverend Currens was called as pastor and built the church's sanctuary. Labor and materials were supplied or donated by the members (the bell in the bell tower came from the Boulder Fire Department). This was no small undertaking

considering the long hours and working conditions associated with hard rock mining at the turn of the century. The Great War or World War I began in Europe the same year. Since the United States was neutral until 1917, the mining companies were free to sell their tungsten to both sides of the conflict and the mining boom in Nederland accelerated. By the time Rev. Currens had the roof on the new church, the mining boom had resulted in a severe housing shortage around Nederland. The resourceful Rev. Currens solved the problem by renting pew and floor space in the new church to those who had nowhere else to sleep.

World War I ended in 1918 and signaled the end of the last of the Nederland mining booms. In the fall of 1918 the Influenza Epidemic struck the area. A walk through the town cemetery indicates that the disease wiped out whole families. The minutes from the church records state that by March 1919 all of the area mines were abandoned and the mills were shut down.

This is the last entry in the record book until May 1940 when the records were retrieved from the First Presbyterian Church of Boulder archives. The year 1919 also witnessed the demise of the railroad that ran between Boulder, Ward and Eldora following a flash flood that took out all of the railroad's bridges.

One might assume that the church building was abandoned during this time period but such is not the case. Old time residents such as Gladys Proctor, Dick Fraser, Ruby Jackson and Pinkie Graham remember attending services and Sunday school during the years between the two World Wars. The continued church activity may explain how the word 'community' was added to the church's name. There were as few as 150 full time residents in Nederland at this time.

A Congregational Meeting was held on May 5, 1940 with four elders and five trustees listed in attendance. This was the last recorded formal Presbyterian Church activity until 1949. The same time period saw the entry of the United States into World War II. It is known that many of the remaining residents left the area to serve in the war or work in defense plants elsewhere.

Unofficial records indicate that Reverend E.M. Steen conducted services at the church during summers from 1945 to 1950. Many of the old miner's cabins around Nederland and Eldora were converted to summer homes following the decline of the area mines.

The summer services were then and still are today attended by people vacationing in the area. The church was reorganized on July 10, 1949 and Rev. Steen was called to be the regular pastor on January 30, 1950. At the Annual Congregational Meeting on January 11, 1951 the average Sunday attendance during the prior year was reported as 37 people.

During the winter of 1952-1953 Boulder Canyon road was closed for reconstruction. Old time residents recall that the journey between Nederland and Boulder was an all day event on a narrow, winding dirt road. Some sections of the original highway right-of-way are still visible in Boulder Canyon. Rev. Steen requested to be removed as pastor due the difficulty he had traveling between Boulder and Nederland during this time.

Mr. Lawson filled the pulpit from 1952 to 1953 except for the winter months. The deed to the "West Plot" was donated to the church on April 5, 1953 according to a letter from Lois Guyer. The "West Plot" eventually became the site of the Fellowship Hall addition. Church services were suspended during the winter of 1953-54. Reverend Steen, who was one of the principle people involved with re-establishment of the Presbyterian Church in Nederland, passed away on April 14, 1954 in the Boulder Sanitarium.

Reverend Allen Hollister Swan was called as the part time pastor on September 19, 1954. He served both the Nederland and the Valmont churches from 1954 to 1957 when he returned to school for his doctorate degree. The year 1954 also marked the beginning of a Sunday School program by Mrs. Lillie Olson. The original wood shingled roof was replaced in 1957.

Dr. Eliot Porter was called to be the Stated Supply Minister from 1958 to 1960. There were 71 members of the church listed in the roll in 1959, not all of whom were active members. The office of Church Trustee was abolished and the number of Elders was increased from 3 to 7 during the same year.

The years 1960 to 1963 saw a number of pastors serve the church including Rev. Harrison, Rev. Sillars and Rev. Beattie. Reverend Donald Snavely was called as permanent pastor on December 12, 1962. Elaine Hill began serving as the church organist in June of 1964. She continued in that capacity for the next thirty years, commuting between Boulder and Nederland for the Sunday Service.

The Sanctuary was remodeled in 1968 and the church paid \$50 to be connected to the town's sewer system that same year. One can only imagine what the bathroom facilities were like up to that point in time. The West addition to the original Sanctuary building was built between 1970 and 1972. Harry Stillwagon led the effort. The church membership donated enough time and money that the addition was built without a single loan or mortgage and several hundred dollars were left over in the building fund at the completion of the project. Records indicate the total cost was between \$5000 and \$7000.

The Fellowship Hall, as the West addition came to be called, was dedicated on August 20, 1972. It has been used for a number of purposes over the years including Sunday School rooms, a food pantry, clothing closet and a day care center. Boy Scout and Girl Scout Troops have used it for their meetings and activities.

The Fellowship Hall was used to serve the annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner for many years. The dinner was so popular that three shifts were used to accommodate the number of diners. All three of the area churches hosted the event by supplying the cooks and the food. Catholic Catechism classes have been held there as well as Jewish Sabbath services.

Besides the Fellowship Hall addition, the church experienced growth in membership and the role it played in the community during the tenure of Rev. Don Snavely. It was a sad day when he resigned as pastor on January 23, 1973 after more than ten years of service to the church and community. During most of his pastorship he was paid as a part time pastor; Don worked for the Gilpin County Highway department as a full time employee. His term as pastor has been the longest of any of the pastors to serve the church to date.

Nearly a year went by while the pastor nominating committee searched for Rev. Snavely's replacement. Rev. Warren Muller was called on February 10, 1974 and installed on May 5, 1974. The selection of Rev. Muller was a wise one, for the church experienced continued growth during his tenure as pastor. He was instrumental in establishing a very active church youth program that brought many young families into the church membership during the 1970s.

Through the 1960's the Nederland economy changed focus from mining and ranching to supporting recreational activities and commuters. The Lake Eldora Ski area was built and the improved highway between Boulder and Nederland made it easier for people to commute between the plains and the mountains. Gloria Fraser established a day care center for young children in the early 1970s. This service made it possible for many Nederland women to work outside of the home. The church opened the Community Preschool on April 7, 1975 with twelve children attending. It was operated in the Fellowship Hall and on the grounds of the church. The preschool eventually outgrew the Church's facilities and was closed in 1986 when Gloria retired as Director of the program.

The "North Lots" were purchased on April 9, 1982. These lots have been used for a number of purposes including picnics, Vacation Bible School, and as a parking area. The town of Nederland currently maintains the lot in exchange for parking space during the week.

Rev. Warren Muller resigned as pastor on May 28, 1983. His departure as pastor began a difficult period as the congregation searched for a suitable long-term replacement. Rev. Bob Bruns served as interim pastor from 1983 until February 1984 when Rev. Mel Bridge was called as pastor. Rev. Bridge resigned in October 1984 due to health and personal problems. Bill Peterson took over some of the duties as a student pastor until Rev. Bob Bruns was called as pastor on March 24, 1985. Rev. Bruns resigned as pastor on June 16, 1986. The difficulties experienced by the church during this time period reflected problems in the community. The ski area closed for a

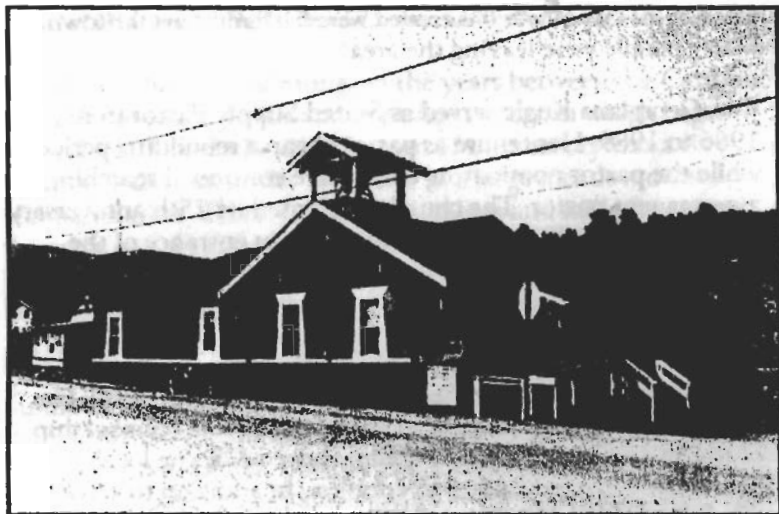
year and the loss of jobs this created were felt throughout the town. Many people were leaving the area.

Rev. Georgiana Kugle served as Stated Supply Pastor from 1986 to 1989. Her tenure as pastor began a rebuilding period while the pastor nominating committee continued searching for a permanent pastor. The church celebrated its 75th anniversary on August 23, 1987. The steps to the main entrance of the church were replaced and a handicap ramp was built. The church celebrated a number of baptisms and marriages during Rev. Kugle's service.

Rev. Mark Lake was installed as pastor on June 15, 1989. He was the first full-time pastor in recent years. The membership of the church increased during his service while the local economy recovered from the recession. In addition to serving the congregation, Mark provided many hours of counseling to the community. During this time the stained glass windows on the East side of the sanctuary were created by Larry Cox in memory of his late wife Marge. Rev. Lake resigned as pastor at the end of 1993 to pursue interests as an artist in sculpture and pottery.

Rev. John Minear served as stated supply pastor from 1993 to 1995 while the pastor nominating committee searched for Rev. Lake's replacement. After an extensive search and a yearlong congregational study facilitated by Rev. Minear, Rev. Holly Heuer was called as a part time pastor. She commutes to Nederland from Denver several times a week to serve the congregation. During her tenure the sanctuary has been completely remodeled using funds from Elaine Hill's estate. A Sunday School Director has been hired and the church once again enjoys growth in membership.

The church continues to support the Nederland community by providing space and people for the Nederland Food Pantry. The church provides meeting space for a number of non-profit organizations including the Girl Scouts of America and the Alcoholics Anonymous. While times have changed since the church was organized in 1912, Nederland Community Presbyterian Church continues to live up to the intention of the original seventeen members- serving the community and making Nederland a better place to live.



The Church as it is today

This brief history would not have been possible without the help, stories and support of the following people:

Holly Heuer  
Dick and Gloria Fraser  
Brownlee and Lois Guyer  
Irene Smith  
Edith Scates  
Joanne Chavez

The following books were used as historical references:

Historical Sketch of the Presbytery of Boulder Colorado and its Enrolled Churches, 1883 to 1933.

The 1990 Nederland Calendar, by G. Blevins

Nederland, A Trip to Cloudland, by Isabel M. Becker

Inn and Around Nederland, Accommodating the Travelers Then and Now, by Silvia Pettem

Nederland Community Presbyterian Church Session Records, Volumes 1, 2, 3, and 4, by various clerks of session

"A Brief History of Nederland Community Presbyterian Church"  
is dedicated to the memory of Elaine Hill and Jennie Platt