

league baseball club for the Charleston community. Popular names for these teams included the Charleston Senators, the Charleston Charlies, the Charleston Wheelers, and the Charleston Alley Cats. This facility was demolished in 2005 and currently is the site of the CAMC Cancer Center.

At the corner of MacCorkle Avenue and 39th street and continuing east to 40th street are the Kanawha Village Apartments. This apartment community was built after World War II to accommodate veterans. With multiple buildings of three stories and 174 units, this complex continues to provide housing adjacent to the site of Village Chapel.

While the Kanawha City area had many interesting and diverse activities and services, it gradually became a popular residential area. Kanawha City was incorporated into the city of Charleston in 1929.

KANAWHA CITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES:

To better appreciate the history of Village Chapel Presbyterian Church, it is helpful to look at aspects of the development of its sponsoring Church—the First Presbyterian Church of Charleston. Founded in the early 1800's, First Presbyterian Church is the second oldest Presbyterian Church in the “The Sheltered Valley” second only to Kanawha Salines Presbyterian Church located in Malden, West Virginia. The first deed for land on what is now Charleston, and the site of First Church was dated November 1, 1821. (History of the Presbytery or Kanawha 1895-1956, Forward, pp. 40-45).

Located in downtown Charleston on the Kanawha River in Kanawha County, the First Presbyterian Church, largely through the work of the Reverend J. Moody McNair, became the founding sponsor of several churches in the area, including four churches in the Charleston suburb of Kanawha City--South Ruffner, South Park, Westminster and Village Chapel.

Reverend McNair came to Charleston May 1, 1940, to accept the pastorate of the Presbyterian Church at Belle, West Virginia, and to give part of his time to the work of the Cabin Creek Mission. In the course of time, Mr. McNair was installed as an Assistant Pastor at First Church. As a true missionary, he soon became involved in organizing missions which over time, grew into self-supporting churches. South Park and Village Chapel both began as “McNair missions” and evolved into Kanawha City Presbyterian Churches – both are still serving the Kanawha City area as active Presbyterian Churches. South Ruffner and Westminster are no longer active.

SOUTH RUFFNER CHURCH was originally opened as the Lick Branch Church Union Sunday School sometime prior to 1890. The school began with an attendance of 25 to 30 individuals composed of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians who worked together in “great harmony”. By 1890 the attendance had reached 75 to 80. Over the ensuing years, the Church was housed in several structures and by 1946 had evolved into the Kanawha City Presbyterian Church with a membership of over 300. In 1947, a permit was granted to build

a new church on the corner of 20th Street and Kanawha Avenue. The new building was formally dedicated on December 10, 1950, though a sign on the front of the church identifies it as the South Ruffner Presbyterian Church with the date, 1948. Today, signage in front of this structure indicates it is now the “Hope Church” with services on Sundays at 9:30 AM and in smaller letters below this it indicates it is the South Ruffner Presbyterian Church with Sunday services at 11AM.

The **WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** was started in 1919 as a mission church, again with the support of the First Presbyterian Church of Charleston, to serve a growing Kanawha City community of glassworkers and their families. Meetings were held in the Owens Club Room, which suggests that these took place at the Owens-Illinois Glass Plant. In October 1923, church members began meeting in a home located at 2511 Kanawha Avenue in the South Ruffner area just five blocks from the South Ruffner Church. The Sunday school and church services were held at this location until completion of the church building at its long-term location in 1925. This building was financed by members of the First Presbyterian Church and the Kanawha City Church and was officially organized on August 25, 1925. Westminster celebrated its 75th anniversary in the year 2000 and would be celebrating its 100-year anniversary in 2025. Services continued at Westminster until its closure on December 24, 2019. With its closure, several of the Westminster congregation members transferred their church membership to Village Chapel.

SOUTH PARK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH was built in South Park, another area of Kanawha City--a small community of about two hundred families located in the southwestern area along the narrow valley of Venable Branch, a very small stream which flows to and empties into the Kanawha River in the vicinity of 29th Street. Organized as a “mission” under the direction of Dr. J. Moody McNair, and the First Presbyterian Church, it became South Park Presbyterian Church on May 5th, 1946, with forty-two charter members. Currently, South Park is still an active church and over recent years has participated with Village Chapel to engage in church and community activities.

VILLAGE CHAPEL - IN THE BEGINNING – THE 1940s

Village Chapel was first conceived in 1946 in the minds of Reverend J. Moody McNair, then the Minister of Chapels of the First Presbyterian Church, Mr. Payne Brown, and Mr. Donald Cork. Enlisting the support of the officers of Charleston’s First Presbyterian Church and several interested Kanawha City laymen, these founding fathers were authorized to proceed to establish an “outpost”. The sponsoring Church, First Presby, voted to purchase a building site at the corner of 39th Street and Venable Avenue.

Guidance for the development of the new church was provided by a Council, because it was not yet a constituted church. Members of the Council included Reverend McNair as moderator; John C. Arter, Doyme B. Berlien, Payne Brown, Joe F. Burdette, Elmer H. Dodson, Carolyn H. Cork, Donald L. Cork, Marjorie S. Draus, Robert B. McCue, John Mendenhall, Leroy Osborn, Violet S. Pitzer, Joseph S. Soto, Fred Work, and Kenneth Wren. This core of