

THE JUDSON STAFF

The history of Judson House took a sharp turn in 1948. Until that time, the building—group of buildings, really—had been rented out by the New York Baptist City Society (NYBCS) for others to use. In 1947, Melissa Russell, whose husband was the associate secretary of the City Society, became interested in Judson Church. She wanted to work out something with New York University so that Judson House would become a laboratory for Christian education at NYU. The students could live at the house for a minimal fee while being involved in this work.

About that time, Dean and Margaret Wright were planning to come to New York, where Dean was going to pursue a graduate degree at Columbia University. Dean was looking for a part-time job and approached the City Society. Mrs. Russell hired him to be the director of the new student program. Dean and Margaret moved into 81 West Third Street in September 1948 and began their work with the students.

A year after the Wrights came to Judson, Robert W. Spike, who was also in graduate school and also needed a part-time job, became the senior minister of Judson. He and his wife, Alice, and their son Paul moved into 81 West Third as well. This was in September 1949. At the time, the Judson congregation consisted of only a handful of people, and the real work of Judson took place in Judson House with the students. The Judson Council, which was the committee in the NYBCS that oversaw the affairs of Judson Memorial Church, proposed that Dean's job be made into a full-time position, and the NYBCS agreed.

The congregation slowly began to grow, and Bob Spike and Dean Wright felt that they needed more control over Judson House and Judson Church. The NYBCS had placed a woman in the church who oversaw the rental of various spaces to different groups, and

Dean and Bob had little to say over what she did. Her name was Ruth Thompson, and she became the bane of everyone's existence. There is a story about the Police Athletic League, which ran a program in the gymnasium below the church one night a week for the Italian kids just south of Judson. One week Mrs. Thompson canceled the program so that she could rent the space to a group of ladies who wanted to give a Christmas party *for their dogs*. The women were walking their dogs around the gym, and the kids had their faces pressed against the mesh screen above the gym. They were perfectly happy because they had never seen anything like it.

Things came to a head in the summer of 1950 when the building at 81 West Third was condemned and razed to the ground. The Wrights and the Spikes needed room in Judson House. At this time also, the Judson Health Center was ready to move to larger quarters, so most of the space in the building became available. That was also the year of the first Church in Urban Life project, a three-month program for Baptist students from other parts of the country to study the work of the church in an urban environment. Howard Moody had been invited to run the project. Howard and Lorry arrived right after the collapse of 81 West Third. There was no place for them to stay other than the space that later became the Sunday School room, just above the gymnasium in the church basement. To give themselves some privacy, they hung a blanket over the mesh wiring.

Dean Wright and Bob Spike requested a meeting with the NY-BCS to see if Judson could not become more autonomous. Surprisingly, the Society acceded to their request, and from this moment dates the modern Judson Church as we know it.

The earliest staff member represented in this book is Robert Boyd, who moved into Judson House in 1947 to manage the students that lived there. Judson House offered an attractive alternative to NYU housing, without any rules about curfew and such.

In the chapters that follow, a variety of staff, paid and unpaid—ministers (senior, associate, assistant, interim), some of the spouses and one child, church secretaries, sextons, and program directors—provide a patchwork of more than fifty years of Judson House history.

Two former staff members who contributed chapters are not included here. Bernard (Bud) Scott, assistant minister from 1957 to

1960, was so totally involved in the arts that we have placed his chapter in the section on "The Judson Gallery"; and John Tunge's brick-by-brick and squeak-by-squeak description of Judson House, we felt, belonged more properly in the section called "The Building."
