

The NEW BERN

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Yesterday was when New Bernians were more enthusiastic about wearing political buttons than they are today. Most citizens shy away from making public display of their voting intentions.

No one has a right to argue against this. Unless a voter is protected by a cloak of secrecy, there can be no freedom at the polls. Beyond that, those who ask you to reveal your choice deserve to be lied to.

Business men, the ones who aren't active politicians, consider it fool-hardy to flaunt their preference. Customers, they sense, can be quickly irritated by the merchant who distributes campaign fodder.

Even if the customer's sentiments coincide with the store owner's, there is likely to be a feeling that business and politics don't mix. And a customer may be lost in those instances where there is a sharp difference of opinion.

But, getting back to those campaign buttons, they were flourishing as long ago in New Bern as 1892. At first, the celluloid discs were used in lapel button-holes. A short time later, pins were attached.

History says that the first big order came from famed Mark Hanna, when he purchased five million for the successful McKinley campaign. Then as now, celluloid was fairly inexpensive, which explains why no other type of button has supplanted the original version of any great extent.

If you're under the impression that ingenuity in the manufacture of political buttons is a modern development, you are mistaken. Some of the old-time creations were masterpieces.

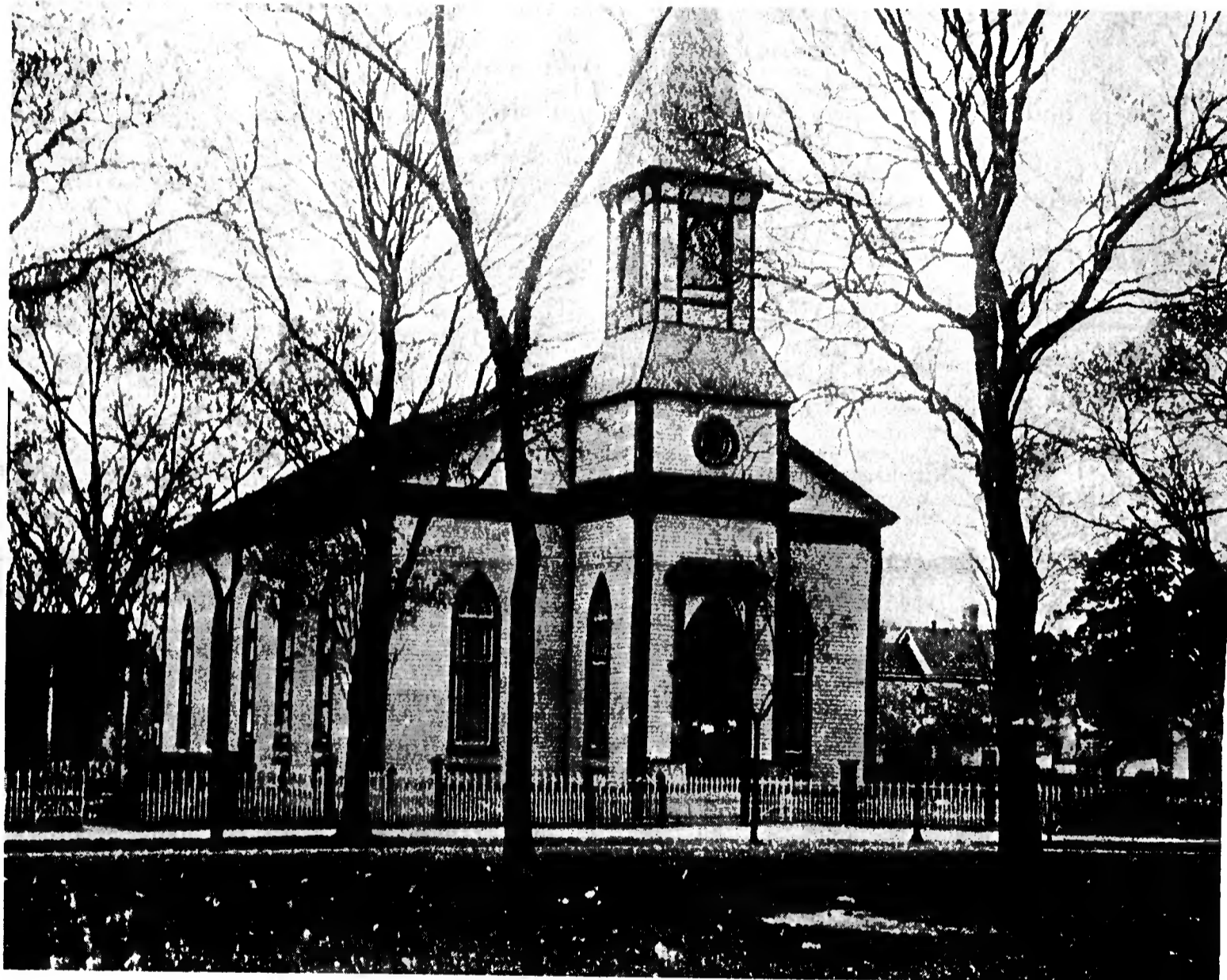
For example, supporters of McKinley in his first presidential campaign wore small gilt bees in their lapels. When the bee's tail was flicked, it released a spring. The wings spread wide open, and photos of McKinley and Hobart were visible.

In addition, the Republican party had an elephant shaped pin, with a blanket that flew up and displayed McKinley and Hobart. They also had a pin called the "Presidential Chair". By releasing a catch under the seat, McKinley's face was revealed.

Perhaps the most unusual political button to blossom that year, or any other year, was an emblem depicting the front door of the White House. By manipulating it, you could show either McKinley or the man he defeated, William Jennings Bryan.

Before celluloid buttons arrived on the scene, campaign buttons were made of lead, rubber, brass, silver, wood and bone. Woodcuts were being used in the latter days of the 1790's, and with the advent of the 1800's, tintypes were used in metal frames.

How effective are these campaign buttons? That's a debatable question. Some of the cutest, cleverest and most derogatory were distributed in



ONCE UPON A TIME—Only New Bern's oldest living citizens will recognize this stately frame structure as the town's original Centenary Methodist church. It stood on New Street, across from the Academy Green, and hundreds of happy couples, in their graves now for generations, spoke their wedding vows here. Babies in profusion were christened at the altar within, and much of Cedar Grove Cemetery is filled with the devout whose last rites were solemnly spoken in the sanctuary. Churches, like humans, sad to say, sometimes lose their dignity and usefulness in declining years. There came a day when this old edifice that had meant so much to so many no longer sufficed. A beautiful brick structure, the most spacious house of worship in town, supplanted it at the corner of New and Middle Streets. What does one do with an old church no longer needed? In this instance it was

sold, and during early decades of the Twentieth Century was used as a storage place for cotton bales. The belfry was silent and forlorn, save for the cooing of numerous pigeons that roosted there. The steeple disappeared, with the passing of many seasons, and eventually the building in its shabby entirety was torn down. There were those who, to the last, felt a tug at the heart whenever they passed the old abandoned church, crumbling into oblivion. Memories don't fade easily, whether they be bitter or sweet, and the wheels of progress can't erase them. Very few are the New Bernians still around, however, who in retrospect hear old Centenary's bell, pealing in times of joy, and tolling in times of grief. Yes, church houses, like mortals, pass on, and are forgotten.—Photo from Albert D. Brooks Collection.