

# Church Site Is Purchased

The site of the fire-ravaged Asbury Methodist Church, Jefferson and Hamilton streets, Allentown, was purchased yesterday by the city for \$310,000.

It will be held for future development of a new public library to replace the existing structure at 914 Hamilton Mall.

Settlement took place in the office of Commonwealth of Lehigh, Inc., a title insurance agency. Atty. John Potts of Philadelphia and S. Glenn Ellenberger, president of the Asbury board, represented the church, and Atty. James J. McConnell, assistant city solicitor, appeared for the city.

The city had the option of paying \$280,000 for the property and demolishing the church. This was rejected after a decision that the total cost as a cleared site would be no less. The Zuk Lumber & Demolition Co., Inc., is razing the edifice.

Henry Moggio, finance chairman of Allentown School Board and president of the library board, said an architect has not been hired to design a new library. That would be premature until Hamilton Mall commercial development gains more momentum, he said. "We have to wait to see whether we can get federal funds to help us in paying for construction," he added.

A library building fund has been set up by the board for memorial gifts. "Establishment of the fund presents many opportunities for lasting and meaningful memorial gifts by thoughtful people," Moggio said.

The former church site has a total frontage of 205 feet on Hamilton Street and runs to Maple Street. The size is slightly more than an acre.

Money for the program is set aside in the Capital Improvements Fund, which has an appropriation of \$350,000 for the purpose. The remaining \$40,000 is to be used for development of the tract as a parking lot until such time as the school district exercises its option to buy the property for library construction.

The city intends to prepare the lot for its temporary use as soon as demolition is complete and the basement is backfilled for surfacing. The parking operation is to be leased to a private operator.

Income from the parking lease is expected to cover interest costs on the city's investment. If it doesn't, however, the school district has agreed to use the contribution of a private individual to make up the difference.

The school district hopes to have federal aid to buy the property and construct a new library in about five years. It also will use proceeds from the sale of the present library at 914 Hamilton Mall.

Mayor Joseph S. Daddona, commenting on the city's purchase, said it marks the initial stage of a program solving a number of needs for the community, primarily the need for larger library facilities, with parking.

During the interim, he said, additional off-street parking will be provided for center city on a contractual basis, hopefully freeing other spaces for turnover use by shoppers and visitors.

"And once the present library site is sold, it will become prime commercial land which will add greatly to the city's tax base," he stated, noting the library building is now tax exempt.