

WILLOW METHODIST CHURCH HISTORY

The Willow Methodist Church was organized in the year 1860 in the Rural School house at Smithville, A little Village situated on what is now known as Clark Road.

But it really had it's origin in a class formed sometime in the year 1841 by Martin H. Ford, A local preacher. This early Church was known as A "Methodist Episcopal Society". The charge was supplied by ministers from the Dearbornville, Michigan Circuit and from Flat Rock, Michigan and sometimes from Belleville, Michigan.

After 1863 it was attached to the Romulus Circuit and later to New Boston. The Church building was erected in the year 1868 at Smithville- about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile north of Willow Road-on Clark Road- just across the creek. It was dedicated in September, 1868 by Rev. Selah W. Noyes who was pastor of the Romulus and New Boston Churches at that time.

In the year 1877 it was moved to it's present site; to the little town of Belden, now known as Willow.

Location for the church was presented by Mr. Winchester - Bldg. mover Mr. Bemis from Wagner Mich

The Smithville school house, in which this church was organized, was typical of its day. A one room red brick building located on Clark Road, also just across the creek. This building finally became unsafe for use as A school house-was condemned and torn down in the year 1910. It was replaced by A frame building which was in use until the Smithville School District ~~until the S~~ became A part of the Consolidated School System.

Some of the early ^{StoRS} ~~Pastors~~ ^C of the Church were...

Rev. Selah W. Noyes	1868
Rev. James Kilpatrick	1870
Rev. Thomas Nichols	1871-1882

This information on early ^m Ministers of this ^C Church is by courtesy of the Conference Historian, Rev. William C.S. Pellowe.

There seems to be some difference of opinion as to the year the church was moved from Smithville to Belden. Mrs. May Romine, late historian of the ^C Church, had the information from the late Mrs. ~~Thomas~~ Parks, an old time resident of the community and member of the ^C Church, that it was moved in the year 1877. The ^C Con-

ference historical information is that it was moved in the year 1888. However, we are inclined to believe that Mrs. Romine's information may be more nearly correct. An old book of records of the meetings of the board of trustees of the church dating back to January 26th, 1881 has been located and indicates that the church was then located in Belden.

The record is very incomplete but the following is an account of some of the minutes of the trustees meetings. "Belden, Mich. Jan. 26, 1881" Rev. J.H.Caster, pastor of the church called a meeting of the board to consider the placing of a mortgage on the church for the sum of five hundred twenty dollars (\$520.00) to liquidate a debt that was already on the church. The vote to mortgage the church was unanimous, with the stipulation that the interest rate was not to exceed 8% per annum. The board members present at this meeting were-- F.J.Belden, Sec., George W.Smith, J.F.Smith and Samuel Croft.

The trustees records indicate that some of the pastors who served the church at that time were.....

Rev. J.H. Caster 1881

Rev. F. Pearce 1882 - 1885

Elder Rose 1888

On Nov. 10, 1884, Rev. Pearce called a meeting of the trustees to the home of "Brother George Curtis" of Belden, Mich. to consider what could be done to raise money to pay on the church debt. It was decided that some of the trustees go with the pastor to call on the people to see what amount of money could be raised. They called on friends of the church as well as members and their efforts were fruitful for the mortgage was "paid in full and delivered to the secretary" on Jan. 2, 1885.

Belden, Mich. Mar. 31, 1886

J.C. Wright, Chairman of the board, called a meeting of the trustees to decide whether or not to permit the Free Methodists to use the church. It was decided to let them "occupy the church every other Sabbath". And that they pay \$25.00 per year for the privilege of occupying the church, not to be considered as rent but to keep with the general expenses.

"Dec. 5, 1888"

At a meeting of the board of trustees it was decided to discontinue the use of the church to the Free Methodists since they had A church so near by.

The church at that time was probably the only building in the community large enough to accomodate A crowd of any very large size and at this same Dec.5,1888 meeting A "Prof. Dalrymple" asked permission of the trustees to use the church in which to conduct A "Singing School". These early trustees had a great reverence for the church and weren't quite sure of just whether or not it was right to use the church for this purpose, so they decided to ask the "Presiding Elder" concerning the matter, when the quarterly conference met which was to be in a few days. This they evidently did and he must have given his blessing in the matter for at A meeting of the trustees Dec. 26, 1888 Prof. Dalrymple was granted permission to use the church building in which to conduct his Singing School for the term of twenty nights under the following rules...

- "1st. That no person be allowed in the church but members of the class unless it be a parent or guardian.
- 2nd. That no music or singing shall be used that is not suitable for church prrpose.
- 3rd. The class shall furnish their proportion of wood and lights.
- 4th. That the strictest order shall be kept both before and after school."

The meeting was then adjourned to meet again on Jan.3, 1889.

Mr. George T. Clark of Smithville was secretary of the board at this time. This little church by the side of the road has ever been ready to serve the community in that which is good and helpful.

Further evidence of this spirit is indicated in A of August 23, 1889. The trustees were given permission to use the church on Sun. Sept. 1, 1889. "Hayes of Nebraska to preach." And later in that year Nov. 1889 the church was opened for a concert. The nature of this concert is not stated.

In the month of May (24th) 1889 at a meeting of the trustees a motion was made by H.P. Smith that A penny collection be taken by the stewards each Sabbath

to pay the sexton, "when it does not conflict with other collections". The motion carried. In June of 1880 this practice of raising money was discontinued and A motion to "circulate subscription papers" for the purpose of raising money to finance the care of the church was presented. The motion carried.

Records of the activities of the church for the next ten years were either lost or not kept.

Sometime during the latter part of June or the first part of July 1902 A bell was purchased for the church, no purchase price is recorded. The bell was A small one and presumably A used one. The record does not indicate whether or not there was A bell prior to this time. In the year 1906 A new bell was presented to the church by Mrs. Ella Richards. Mrs. Richards and her husband, Morris V. Richards, both very earnest Christian members of the church, had planned to give A bell to the church but in May Mr. Richards died leaving his young widow with A small daughter to care for alone. Mrs. Richards decided to carry on the plans she and Mr. Richards had made and to trust in God to help her with any problems that might arise. This she did. The bell was presented that year as planned and is still in use in the church.

Not much was done to the church for several years except minor repairs, such as painting and papering.

In June 1910, according to the trustees record, A motion was made by Delbert Romine and seconded by George Curtis to give the young people A vote of thanks for their effort in raising money for painting and repair of the church.

In the Autumn of 1925 Rev. Howard Cole became our pastor. Remodeling of the church had been contemplated for some time prior to his coming and on April 19, 1926 A special meeting was called to make some decisions as to what could and should be done. Rev. Cole was made chairman and Katherine Charlesworth Secretary. Plans were discussed and Rev. Cole was made chairman of the building committee with permission to choose his helpers: he chose Delbert Romine, Edward Cook, Bert Smith and Harold Charlesworth. There was about eleven hundred dollars in the treasury to begin this project with. This money had been accumulated by the Epworth League, the young people's organiz-

ation of the church at that time; but, since the membership of the church was quite small, most of the members of the church, regardless of age, were members of the Epworth League and so the accumulation of this money was therefore the effort of all.

The plans made for remodeling the church included raising the building and putting in A full basement, A vestibule on the front of the church, and new windows, but leaving the same frames, electric wiring, German siding for the exterior as well as a complete new job of exterior painting, color to be left the same-white. A new furnace to be installed in the basement.

Solicitations for more funds to help with this project were made by the finance committee and A very generous response was the reward. The work was soon started and progressed very well. The auditorium was redecorated, furniture, pews and carpeting were purchased from A church that was no longer being used. Also A very good used piano was installed. The plans made by the committee were fully carried out. The church was raised and full basement put in also the furnace. The vestibule was built, new siding and complete paint job. The total cost of this remodeling venture was \$4815.68. Much of the work, however, was done free of charge.

On Feb. 27, 1927 it was dedicated by Rev. J.E. Martin the then District Superintendent. At the dedication services enough money was pledged to completely pay off the remaining debt.

During the years of 1940-1941-1942 the exterior of the church was repainted and the walls of the auditorium were cleaned. This was a gift of Mr. George Gifford.

The Young Peoples Sunday School Class painted the dining room and kitchen and made some minor repairs.

Since

young people of the church furnished the
the church.

In June 1942 the W.S.C.S. decided the church auditorium needed A new floor, new carpeting, redecorating and various other things. So plans were made to build A fund with which to do this.

It was decided, as A first step, that each member save as much as she could-

using penny jars-until the December meeting when we were to bring in our savings.

In the Nov. 1942 W.S.C.S. meeting Mrs. Amelia Cooper gave us five dollars with the remark that she might not be able to attend the December meeting. Her prophecy proved correct; her health failed rapidly and she died the following Spring....And so our first contribution. Other members brought their savings to the Dec. meeting and so the project was launched.

In Nov. 1945 the work was started with the walls and ceiling; then a new floor was laid. Mr. John Bordt and Mr. Clarence Mc Intosh did the work of laying the floor free of charge. A decorator was hired to redecorate the wood work, pews and furniture and also the vestibule. The floor was sanded and varnished and A new communion table was built.

To complete the work, new carpeting was laid on the floor in May of 1947. The total cost of this venture was \$1,978.57. A dedication service took place in April 1947 with Rev. Luther Butt, the then District Superintendent, officiating.

In the absence of the pastor, Rev. Earl Champlin, who was ill at the time, having suffered A heart attack, his wife, Mrs. Champlin presided at the afternoon meeting. Mrs. Herman Young sang A solo with Mrs. Walter Nichols as accompanist. Mrs. Delbert Romine reviewed the history of the church. Rev. Butt conducted the service with Mr. John Bordt, Mr. Clarence Mc Intosh, Mr. Delbert Romine and Mr. Fred Wagner, trustees of the church, at the altar. Don Lehman of the Scofield Church presented two cornet solos with his mother, Mrs. Olive Lehman, as accompanist. Rev. Reginald Hocking of Saline, A former pastor, spoke briefly. At this dedication service five persons were baptized and eleven taken into the membership of the church.

In the evening meeting an address was given by Mrs. Earl Champlin. The song service was led by Mrs. Walter Nichols. A reading was presented by Miss Dorothy Charlesworth. Mrs. Merle Romine played A violin solo. Mrs. Harold Charlesworth presided. A cake representing the four dedication services was made by Mrs. Merle Romine and served later in the dining room.

During the time the W.S.C.S. was accumulating the money to pay for the decorating project the Carleton Charge decided to purchase A different house for

A parsonage. The parsonage in use at that time was sold and the money received for it was applied on another. The difference in the price between the two houses was \$2700.00 and was equally deveded between the three churches of the charge, \$900.00 for each church. The W.S.C.S. of Willow Church assumed the responsibility for Willow's share of the debt and in July 1948 Willow's share of the debt was paid in full.

Since the ^aAuditorium was in very good condition at this time the W.S.C.S. directed it's attention to the kitchen which was badly in need of restoration. At the Nov. 1948 W.S.C.S. meeting A decision to start A fund for remodeling it was made. Mrs. Milton Carter and Mrs. Herman Young started the fund that day with A contribution of fifteen dollars, and so another project was begun. Various means to raise money for this project were employed. Some money for this project was given in ~~in~~ memorials and some just as gifts was received. The W.S.C.S. served several chicken suppers, sponsored several bake sales and also conducted two Country Fairs. Sometime during the year 1951 Mr. and Mrs. Edward Bell, former residents of the community, presented the church with \$100.00, part of A sum of money received by them in the sale of some property they owned in Willow. This money was given as A token of the kindly regard they had for the church. Although they had moved to another community they remembered the Willow Church, as they expressed it, "Where we first learned to go to church."

This money was kept in the treasury until the Spring of 1953 when the decision was made to use it with other money presented by members andffriends to purchase A new piano. The piano was purchased from the J.L.Hudson Co. of Detroit, Mich. at the cost of \$525.00 and installed in the church for the Easter Morning Service.

Later in the Spring (May 1953) A dedication service was conducted by the late Rev. Robert Lawrson assisted by the pastor, Rev. Adolph Bergman. Rev. and Mrs. L Lawrson, both talented pianists, presented A beautiful musical program. Also there was some congregational singing. Later A luncheon was served inthe dining room and an evening of fellowship followed. A little later in the year of 1953 the church ~~was~~ needed A new roof. Mr. Clarence Mc Intosh started the fund for this by presenting fifty dollars as A memorial to his father who had recently passed away. The balance of funds needed for this project was made up by other members of the church.

Mr. Clarence Jaworski did the work of roofing the church free of charge.

In Feb. 1955, as A beginning on the kitchen project, two new electric ranges were purchased at the cost of \$530.00.

In April of 1955 A new oil burning furnace was purchased to replace the badly worn old coal furnace. This furnace was purchased and installed at A cost of \$1250.00. The W.S.C.S. PAID \$700.00 of this amount.

In the Spring of 1955 A dedication services was conducted by Rev. Luverne Finch, District Superintendent to dedicate the new electric ranges, also some gift memorials. A gift of an ^{Altar} Bible, and pulpit hymnal presented by the Charlesworth family in memory of Harold Charlesworth. An electric refrigerator presented by the Herrmann family in memory of John Herrmann. Cross and candle holders and one collection plate presented by relatives and friends in memory of Vaun Gifford. The second collection plate was presented by Mr. and Mrs. Roger Young. A piano lamp was presented by the Ross family in memory of Vaun Gifford. A sterling silver baptismal bowl was presented by the Adult Sunday School Class in memory of Mrs. Delbert Romine. A cabinet for Sunday School supplies was presented by Mr. and Mrs. Herman Young. Those who made the presentations at the altar were Mrs. Katherine Charlesworth, Mrs Walter Nichols, Mrs Kenneth Herrmann and Mrs. Herman Young.

In March 1956 the W.S.C.S. had the carpet in the auditorium cleaned and moth proofed at A cost of \$50.00.

In January 1957 the W.S.C.S. decided to complete the kitchen project started in Nov. 1948. Mrs. Kenneth Edwards and Mrs. Edward Miller were chosen as A committee to draft plans. This they did with the help of Mr. Verlin Husk, contractor who was hired to do the work. New cupboards, sink and water system with a water heater were installed. Also complete new electric wiring. This at A total cost of \$2,340.00. This work was begun and finished in January 1957. There was only \$1000.00 in the W.S.C.S. treasury at the beginning of this work (Jan. 1957) and so there was A debt of \$1,340 when the work was completed. To meet this deficit A loan of \$1,340 was secured from The Peoples State Bank of New Boston, Mich. with interest at 4%. This loan was made possible by members of the board of trustees of the church who so kindly gave the security needed by signing A note for this amount of money.

Those who signed the note were - Walter Nichols, Clarence Jaworski, John Bordt, Joseph Istvan, William Dierdorf, William Lunney, Edward Miller and Kenneth Edwards. This loan was paid in full July 20, 1957 by the W.S.C.S..

About this same time the well was cleaned and dug deeper to provide A better water supply. This was paid for out of the church treasury.

In Jan. 1956 the Uht Funeral Directors presented the W.S.C.S. with six dozen folding chairs for the dining room.

In the Spring of 1956 new front doorswere purchased for the church at A cost of \$94.00. Mr. Lee Lincoln, A carpenter in the community and A friend of the church, installed them free of charge.

In the Spring of 1957 the young Married People's Sunday School Class presented the church with an awning for the doors.

In October 1957, Mrs William Felt, Mrs Dale Felt andMr. and Mrs Mantous Uht presented the W.S.C.S. with new dishes for the dining room. At this time Mrs. William Felt and Mrs. Dale Felt also presented some table silverware. Sometime during the year of 1957 fire extinguishers and A newladder were purchased for use in fire protection. In Nov. 1957 Mr. Harry Shiminsky presented the churchwith A new pulpit Bible in memory of his wife Ruth Shiminsky. It was accepted by the pastor, Rev. Howard Watkins.

In Jan. 1958 two jacks were placed under the sills of the church to give support to the building. Also at this time A new sump pump was purchased and installed.

Before this narrative is completed perhaps something should be mentioned about the interior of the church before the remodeling took place in 1926. dedication date Feb. 27, 1927. Not many of us are left who remember it as it was then. The heating system at that time consisted of two round, coal or wood, heating stoves. One stove was placed inthe south west corner of the Auditorium, the other inthe North east corner.

There were double doors opening to the outside on the north east side of the building, just below the rostrum and near where the stove was placed. The rostrum

at that time was covered with A flowered ingrain carpet. These doors to the east were removed and the opening closed when the church was remodeled.

The lighting system consisted of kerosene oil lamps. A chandelier with eight lamps was hung from the ceiling in the center of the room; wall lamps with reflectors were hung in brackets by the side of each window.

The vestibule was A small section partitioned off the auditorium in A sort of semi circle with doors leading into the auditorium from each side. There was no central aisle in the church. There were two rows of pews, joined together in the center and A single row of pews on each side with aisles between center and side pews, and so two narrow aisles.

The pews were hand made of walnut lumber, probably made by the carpenter who built the church 'tho there's no data to substantiate this statement. Some of the lumbe from these pews was used to make four tables for the dining room at the time of the remodeling and are still in use. Not all of the old pews were dismantled at that time, however. They were used in the basement for Junior church and Sunday School for sometime, but have since been dismantled and the lumber from them storedfor future use. There are still some of the old chairs left; twelve walnut chairs, originally with cane seats. Three of them still have the cane seats. The other nine were upholstered with material harmonizing with the pulpit chairs. These chairs were probably purchased or given to the church in it's early years. They are in use now as choir chairs.

Before the time of the remodelint the rostrum andthe Altar rail were straight across the front but A curved section of Altar rail was found inthe attic at that time which matched the straight piece. It was thought at that time that probably the Altar rail hadthe curved section when the church was built so the committee decided to restore it to it's original pattern. And so the rostrum was remodeled and the curved section put in again.

And too, just now, something of the spittitual side of the church might be mentioned. The ^mMinisters in those by gone years conducted many revival meetings,

sometimes with outside speakers or singers helping but bearing the greater part of the burden themselves. They preached with great fervor and many people were genuinely converted. When the minister gave an altar call, people came, confessed their sins, prayed and were prayed for. Back in those days the people of the church called each other brother or sister, whichever the case might be. Then there were the class meetings at each Sunday Service, led by the Minister. Sometimes he'd ask "Has the Lord done anything for y u this past week?" There was joy and blessing in shared experiences.

And the mid week prayer meetings ! The minister came all the way from Romulus, his conveyance A horse and Buggy. Now with automobiles, the distance isn't very great but in those days it must have been quite an undertaking, especially when the roads were muddy or the snow deep.

The minister then, as now, had A three point charge. In these mid week prayer services the minister was leader too. There'd be several sessions of prayer, some singing and testimonials of those present.

If anyone was sick in the neighborhood the minister called on them, prayed for them and encouraged them as did some of the church members. The Ladies Aid deserves much credit too. There is no data available as to when this organization of this church came into being. Possibly it was started when the church was organized. However, there are some who remember of it's existence for nearly sixty years. They used to meet in the homes, later in the Maccabee Hall in Willow, but since the church was remodeled the meetings are held in the church dining room. The old Ladies Aid always met on the last Thursday of each month unless something special prevented. It was not A particularly well organized society, there was A president and ⁵secretary, but it was A working society.

This group of dedicated women served dinners to the public each month for fifteen cents per person. Meals were served family style. Then too there were the special chicken sup ers. At each meeting some kind of program was conducted. It might be some singing or perhaps A reading, always some prayer and Bible reading. They sometimes quilted quilts for three dollars each. The money earned by this

organization was used to support the church, ministers salary etc.. Too they did their best to encourage the ministers in their work. One young minister who came to Willow as his first pastorate, and said he would never forget the kindness Mrs. William Blakely showed him nor the encouragement she gave him when he first came here, A shy young man just beginning his christian ministry.

In the year 1940, when the three branches of the Methodist church joined, the Ladies Aid Society became the Womans Society of Christian Service. At this time A W.S.C.S. was organized at Willow. Meetings are still held on the last Thursday of each month. At these meetings A noonday meal is still served to the public and it's still served family style. *But the price has now increased to \$1.00 per person*