



Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to those who have served the Lord in past years through the mission and witness of our church, and to those who keep this witness alive today.

It is dedicated as well to those who will look back upon us as they continue to make His way known to future generations.

Relocation Centennial Celebration Committee

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Church Celebrates Second Centennial

How can a 132-year-old church celebrate a 100-year birthday? The following history will show you.

In 1839, Reverend Isaac Bennett preached a Methodist sermon in Vermontville and his followers there formed a permanent Methodist group by formally establishing classes. This was in March 1845 in the vicinity of the Brown School (corner of the present-day roads of Brown, Allegan and Gresham), nearly two miles east of town.

Ten members were led by local preacher Henry Robinson and class leader Levi Carr Sprague. Circuit preachers in the tradition of the Methodist greats — John and Charles Wesley, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke — served the area well (until that first class became a church) by meeting in log cabins or primitive school buildings with pioneers who arrived on foot, in carts, or primitive sleds drawn by oxen, or on horseback.

On September 14, 1859, the Michigan Conference in Marshall voted to make Vermontville a separate charge with Reverend Josiah Fowler pastor. At the end of the year he reported 159 members and 15 probationers were received during this period with \$22 raised for benevolences. His salary was \$420, but only \$11 came from Vermontville. The rest was from seven other areas nearby.

The first church building arose in 1862 on the site mentioned above at a cost of \$1600 with the simple dignity of a New England-styled country church. Three years later a formal Sunday School was organized and on September 20, 1859, a

committee was appointed to raise funds to buy a lot on which to build a parsonage. Work began in 1866 and in 1867 the parsonage was completed except for a west side wing added in 1875. The original cost of the parsonage was \$700. Today the house is painted a modern green with white trim, but still stands in the original location on East Main Street. Original deeds and early organizational papers owned by the church are a source of pride, as well as information about these early years.

The Reverend W. J. Swift decided to move the church to town in 1877 and locate it on the northeast corner of the Village Square. The move was opposed by many of the original members who built it. The majority, however, was in favor of the move, and the \$800 cost of moving and repairing was met when it was in place. It was put in one of the two sites set aside for churches in the original colony charter. Feelings between town and country members ran so strongly that the following incident occurred, although the perpetrators were never identified. The building was rolled toward town on poles, a slow process. When near the present site, during the night someone sawed off the tops of some posts, evidently hoping when the building was moved the next day that it would collapse. Fortunately the deed was discovered in time to foil this attempt.

After repairing and redecorating, a rededication ceremony was held January 8, 1878. Since the church was "refitted" a wing was added on the south side of the main building in 1889 for \$1800. The bell was purchased and hung in 1890.