

CHAPTER XIII

RELIGION

Religion has always been a strong force in the building of new areas. The history of religion and the church in this area is no exception. As early as the 1750's the French Jesuits were the major explorers in the wilderness it was their zeal to bring the Christian faith to the "naked savages." That opened this territory for the settlers to follow.

As far as can be determined the first organized religious meeting in the Montague Area were held by the Methodists at the Mouth settlement in May of 1853.

Deacon Abner Bennett, an escaped slave from Canada, was appointed leader. He was a licensed exhorter in the M. E. Church for 39 years at the time of his death in 1879 at the age of 80 years. He is buried in the Montague Cemetery. Rev. L. M. Bennett (no relation) was the first minister appointed to serve the White River circuit in 1855.

The first quarterly conference was held in 1855. An edifice was erected on the present site in 1872, and it burned in 1898. The present edifice was dedicated June 28, 1898.

Wellington Earle was the pastor in 1896.

An addition to the present building was added in 1949.

Rev. William Brown succeeded Rev. C. W. Hutchins, and it was under his leadership that the church observed its 100th anniversary in 1955.

A new parsonage was built in 1957 at the corner of Church and Meade Streets, and new land has been purchased on Hancock Street for the purpose of erecting a new church sometime after 1966.

The 38th pastor was Rev. Neil Bintz, and presently the 39th pastor is Rev. Wirth Tennant.

First Presbyterian Church of Montague was organized in 1868. Meetings were held in the Burrows building located where the Franklin House now stands. Rev. William Ferry loaned Mr. Burrows money on condition he permit church services to be held on the second floor of his building. The Ferrys paid half of the minister's salary for 25 years. The Burrows hall burned in 1871 and E. P. Ferry offered to build a church for the congregation on condition that they build the parsonage. This was done, and the church was dedicated January 9, 1877. For years this was one of the leading churches in this area. Gradually the congregation dwindled, and in 1942 the church entered into an agreement with a Holland Reformed congregation. If the new group would organize themselves into a

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Ferry Memorial Reformed Church, the board of the Presbyterian Church was willing to give them a five year lease on the church with the understanding that if the new congregation proved successful, a deed to the property would be turned over to the Reformed Church at the end of five years for \$1.00. The church started with 15 families and grew to 42 in five years. About 100 attended the presentation of the deed on October 1, 1947. Improvements were made, and the church became self-supporting in 1955. The kitchen and church were completely remodeled and extensive repairs made to the parsonage. A new parsonage has recently been purchased in Mohawk Court. Rev. Sylvester Moths was pastor for several years, then Rev. James DeWitt and now Rev. Gary Aitken. A 25th Anniversary is planned for this year.

St. James Lutheran Church is located on Stebbins Street on the North Hill of Montague. Some of the first ministers were Rev. H. Tonney from 1873-1890, succeeded by Rev. Rudolph from 1891-1893; Rev. F. Hahn 1894-1905; Rev. J. George Neuchterlein 1905-1912; Rev. F. Schreifer 1912-1927 and Rev. A. Krug 1924-1964.

In 1929 the first church was torn down and on September 22nd the corner stone of the new structure was laid. April 6, 1930, it was completed.

In 1950 a new parsonage was built with Rev. A. Krug the first to live in it.

After 70 years, on January 1, 1962, the bell of the Peace Lutheran Church of Claybanks stopped ringing and joined the Montague Church.

St. Peters by the Lake Episcopal Church is a successor to one built in Whitehall in 1873. Services discontinued there in 1914 and the property was sold. Services were held in various cottages from 1917 to 1924. For 30 years hence no organized services were held. In May, 1954, they reorganized and weekly services were held, in the Odd Fellows Hall on Colby Street. Mission was accepted January, 1955, and a vicarage purchased for Rev. Leslie C. Howell, their new pastor. On October 20, 1957, new ground was broken for their church, and it was dedicated January 12, 1958. The church has 43 families. Later in 1966 the vicarage was sold on Meade Street and another one bought on Old Channel Trail near the church. Many more families have been added. Father Maurice Kaser was next pastor and now Father Austin Pellett.

About 1865 the first school in Montague was situated at what is now 8655 Sheridan Street where the Marion Stahl home is. This school was sold to the German M. E. Congregation about 1874, and the parsonage was located across the street where the Heinrich house now is. Rev. J. A. Marquardt was believed to be one of the first pastors in 1896. When no pastor was available, William Thieman, Sr., conducted the services.

Edward, Maratha, Mike & Ronald Benovic

BARTEAU BOAT WORKS

Roy Barteau

BEE'S BEAUTY SHOPPE - Bee Tyler (Prop.)
Mary Lipka, Mary Ann Anderson

BELL FURNITURE

Rev. Haueter was its last pastor. In 1921 the German Methodist Church united with the Montague Methodist Church. The property was sold and torn down and a dwelling built by Mr. and Mrs. William Buttleman.

In 1875 members of the St. James Church Board met at the home of the chairman, the pastor, Father DeCunnick, and the treasurer of the Board to discuss building a church. Several were in attendance and as the kerosene burned low in the lamps and the room was thick with smoke, Father DeCunnick raised his voice and said, "Looks like we can make 'er with everyone doing their part!" and dreams of a St. James Parish were born. The corner of Slocum and Baldwin in Whitehall was selected, and a crew of parishioners were busy with axes, shovels, picks and teams of horses, dreaming of the dedication of the new building to be erected at a cost of \$3,000.00. French and Irish working together soon had the space cleared and heavy wooden sills placed for the foundation. The Irish could be spotted by their heavy woolens and boots; French could be spotted by a colorful sash about his waist or a bit of bead work--an idea borrowed from the Indian who, standing by, dreams of a log house or hogan he has built. Before it was finished, it was transported on skids pulled by horses across frozen White Lake to the corner of Sheridan and Williams Street in Montague. This distinction has been given to very few churches. Their biggest difficulty was getting the church up the steep hill in Montague. It was now 1876. The pastor at the time was Father Barous, succeeded by Father Edward LaFevre who left in 1887 and was replaced by Father Weise who stayed one year. Father Williger came and stayed three years. Father Resson was pastor from 1891-95; Father Theis from 1895-1903 during which time he organized the sewing circle now known as the St. James Altar Guild. Father Hyland came in 1903 and left 1911, succeeded by Father Drew who did much remodeling and stayed 16 years.

Father Heaphy succeeded Father Drew, staying only 14 months; and Father Kenny came, staying 9 months. Father McLaughlin next stayed two years when in 1931 Father Passeno was appointed and stayed till 1944. Father Moleski came and increased the size of the sanctuary and sacristy. In 1953, Father LaPres was made pastor with Father Burkus as assistant. Father Julius Ammon was next pastor and built the present church and school in 1959-60. In 1962 he left, and the present Father Max Ostrowski and Father Bradshaw took over. In September, 1962, the school opened to parish children, it having been previously rented by Montague Public School. Enrollment has reached around 103 pupils.

St. James Parish still retains care of two mission parishes--Rothbury and Claybanks. The school has six classrooms, a lounge

DOWKER DRUG STORE
Robert Dowker
CERTIFIED CONCRETE

COVELL, RUGGLES & VOLK
GENTRY BARBER SHOP
Larry, Vera, Dane, Joe & Mary Clark

and an office. The basement is equipped with a kitchen and dining facilities, and is also used as a skating rink.

Christian Science Church in the year 1922, a group of Christian Scientists began to meet in the home of Mrs. Mathilda Haehnel. A few years later this group asked for permission to form a Society from the Mother Church, the First Church of Christ Scientist in Boston, Massachusetts. This permission was granted and the small section of the Springer store on Dowling Street was rented. About 20 members attended.

As time passed the Town Hall in Montague Township was rented, and several members from the Muskegon Science Church who had moved up here became active. In 1955 the Society was moved to Whitehall and it was incorporated with the State of Michigan as the Montague-Whitehall Christian Science Society, located on East Colby Street. The Society has never been elevated to a full church status because of the small amount of members connected with it.

White Lake Baptist, formerly the White Lake Gospel Center, was started in 1933 with a handful of people who met in the Franklin House that winter. The next spring a store building on Ferry Street was purchased and remodeled and used as a church til September, 1957, when the new building was erected on Dowling Street. Rev. Carl A. Smith, the founder, stayed ten years and was succeeded by Rev. Lloyd C. Sanders, who organized the church into a Baptist Church. The Sunday School began in 1933 with only 17 members and has now grown to 350. Church membership grew to 250 with Rev. Ewing Walters as the pastor. Rev. Arthur Cunningham is the present pastor.

At one time about 1870, there was a Baptist Church near the Jacob Stobbe farm, and H. H. Keyes was its pastor. This would be near where the Germantown School was or what is now the White River Township Hall.

The First Congregational Church was made up of Methodists, Baptists, and Universalists who banded together to form a permanent organization in 1897. First Pastor was Rev. St. Claire. The church was built on the corner of Spring and Division Streets about 1876 for \$5,000. Later a new church was built on Mears Avenue which held its first service on July 11, 1965, which Rev. Keith Davis as pastor.

The White Lake Assembly of God occupied the old Congregational Church on Spring Street in 1966, having moved there from Montague. Pastor is Rev. Glenn I. Muskovin.

Whitehall M. E. Church was built in 1873 at a cost of \$2,700. Rev. Charles Chick, pastor. In 1887 an addition to the church was built and in 1892 a parsonage was bought at the corner of Mears Avenue and Spring Street.

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The Baptist Church was started to be built in 1875 and completed in 1883 with mostly Swedish speaking services. Later the church was sold and moved to Newaygo.

The Swedish Lebanon Lutheran Church was organized in 1872. Parsonage was built in 1874 and the church in 1877. First pastor was Rev. N. A. Youngberg. An addition to the church has been recently built.

Whitehall Wesleyan Methodist Church is located on the corner of Elliott and Division. David L. Roose is the pastor.

Faith Lutheran Church first membership consisted of people who left the St. James Lutheran Church in Montague and others from the White Lake Area. They organized in 1955 and held their meetings at the American Legion Hall and later at the Playhouse. About seven years later they purchased land on Alice Street and started building classrooms. Their new church was dedicated in 1966. Rev. Loren Ruhl was their first pastor and as of March, 1967 their pastor will be Rev. Robert Jacobs. The church and Sunday School addition with eight classrooms and pastor's study was built for \$125,000. It also has a bell taken from the Peace Lutheran Church of Claybanks which has been discontinued.

GAGNON'S SERVICE

WINTER'S BARBER SHOP - Ivan, Jewel,
Marlene, Melissa, Rebecca & Roberto Winters

GOODY-GOODY

Teachers of Montague, Michigan,
Education Association