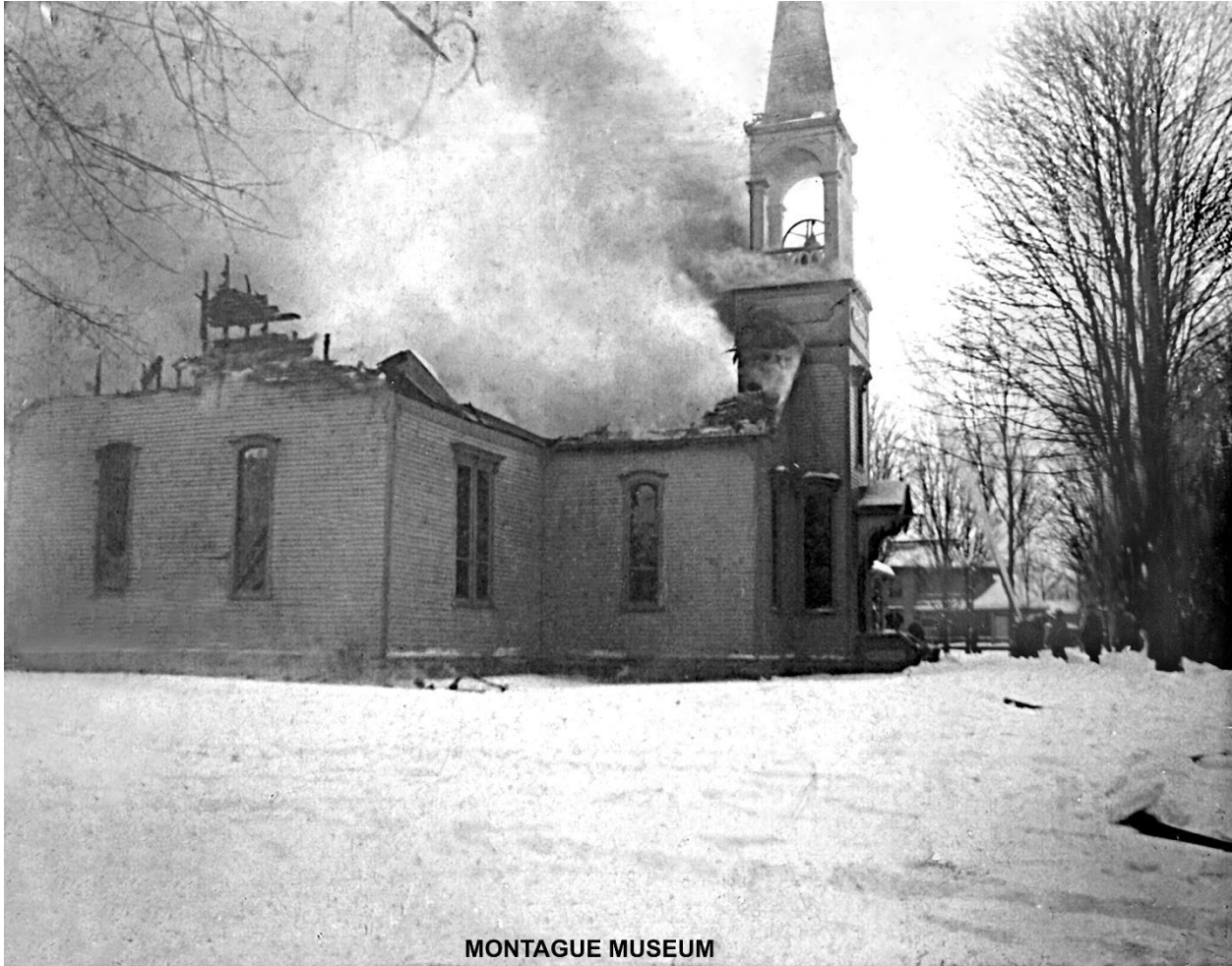


## Churches – Whitehall Methodist Episcopal

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*The first Whitehall M.E. Church 1876-1903*

The Methodist Episcopal church was first organized in Whitehall around 1855 by Elder Charles Chick, with about 17 worshipers meeting in Hobler hall on Colby street. It was a mission station but shortly after became self-sustaining. The church building was built in 1876 and Elder Chick did much of the work of building the church with his own hands.

At 8:45 o'clock on Sunday morning, 13 December 1903, the Methodist church was discovered to be on fire by A. Sanders and at once gave the alarm. When discovered the flames were already eating their way through the roof and the church seemed doomed from the start. The interior of the building was filled with smoke when a crowd began to arrive, and it was supposed that the fire started in the upper part of the church.

Soon after the alarm was made, the fire brigade was quickly on hand and had two streams of water turned on the flames, but by that time the basement was a mass of fire and the flames had gained such a headway that they were uncontrollable. Adding to the situation was a strong gale-force wind blowing from the northwest which was fanning the flames.

Little could be done other than to try and save the residence of F. D. Glazer, which was only a few feet away. A brave effort was made to save the tower and steeple, but it was impossible to do so, and it fell at 10:30, striking the roof of Mr. Glazer's house and barn.

The steeple was the last part of the church standing, and the efforts of the firemen were united in trying to fall the steeple to the left so as not to fall on the Glazer house. For a time it seem as if they would succeed but all at once the steeple swayed and fell toward the street but it did not fall to the ground. Some of the heavy timbers did not give away and it was suspended in the air. Then it whirled halfway around, falling to the roof of the house. It then rolled onto the porch and crushed that down under its weight. The bell, in falling, lodged in the ceiling of the vestibule, but was not damaged. The fight against the fire was made during one of the worst blizzards of the season and the heroic firemen were covered with ice from head to foot.

The origin of the fire was unknown, but there were many rumors that the furnace had the reputation of being unsafe. Ed. Skeels, janitor, thought it came from the chimney and said when he went to church early Sunday morning he noticed a smell of smoke but not enough to cause alarm and there was no fire in the basement at that time. There had been a fire in the lecture room Saturday evening for choir practice, but as the organist did not show up the members went to the home of Mrs. Matteson, and no attention was paid to the fire in the stove. Mr. Skeels had been doing janitor work in the church for the past sixteen years and everyone was confident that it was through no negligence on his part that the fire originated.

The loss was estimated to be between \$6,000 to \$7,000, with an insurance of \$3,500. The main part of the structure was 32x56, and 16x24 lecture room in the rear all of which were constructed in 1876. In 1889 an 24x32 addition was built on the northeast corner. All books, records, 2 organs, 1 piano and furniture were destroyed. Temporary services were held in Glazer hall as plans for the erection of a new building got underway.

New Year's Day 1904 was the day chosen to dismantle the corner stone of the church and remove the copper box which had been placed there at the time of the dedication service on 28 April 1876.

A group composed of the present pastor and trustees of the church, with pick and axe, performed the task of dislodging the hermetically sealed box from beneath the cornerstone in the ruins. The leader of the group was H. E. Staples who knew the exact location of the box and had no trouble finding it. The box, which was found intact was taken to the church parsonage and cut open by H. E. Staples and J. J. Gee, who were officers of the church at the time of the dedication in 1876. There were a large number of members and friends of the church present at the opening of the box, the contents of which were found to be as clean and bright as the day they were put in. All eyes were centered on the mementoes as they were taken from the box, and when the last treasure had been removed there was a keen disappointment manifested by many who had placed articles in the box just before it was sealed, and which were now missing. According to the memory of many about \$12 in coins, a gold watch chain and a

testament were among the things sealed in the box but not a sign of them was found when it was opened New Year's Day.

According to a newspaper account, the following articles were found:

A note, which read "Whitehall, Muskegon Co., Mich. The undersigned are the names of the pastor in charge and the trustees of the M.E. Church of Whitehall, the corner stone of which is laid this day, Apr. 28, A.D. 1876. And today as we consecrate anew this christian work let us thank our Father in Heaven that with the dawn of this centennial year of our nation's independence an era of christian growth has been ushered in all over our land and distant countries and God's lofty spirit has been influencing the hearts of men. Let us then devoutly pray that as the years of the coming century rolls in upon us the christian churchs throughout the land may receive new accessions and fresh baptisms of the Holy Spirit until every house shall become a house of prayer and every heart a fit place for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And as this house is to be built upon the solid rock so may the persons so identified with the society found their spiritual hope upon the rock Christ Jesus. Pastor, Chas. C. Chick, Trustees H. E. Staples, Pres., J. J. Gee, Sec'y, F. Blackmarr, Treas."

The newspapers were: Whitehall Forum, C. P. Nearpress, editor, dated April 26, 1876. Montague Lumberman, Otis Colwell, editor, dated April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1876. Northwestern Christian Advocate, Arthur Edwards, editor, dated April 6, 1876. Christian Secretary.

An epistle from P. Morse & Son, hardware dealers, who presented the copper box in which these mementoes were sealed was also a token of much interest.

A draft on the Lumbermans' Bank of Whitehall which read as follows was among the souvenirs: "Lumbermans' State Bank, Whitehall, April 28, 1876. One thousand years after date pay to the order of James J. Gee, trustee, one million dollars, No. 14403. F. Blackmarr, cashier."

The following names and business cards were also in the box: Card, Lucia B. Ellsworth, Dallas Johnson Butcher, Martin Ranf Tinner, Rev. William Gussman, Nellie E. Chick, Chas. H. Ellis, Mrs. T. H. Dawson, Prof Frank N. Hoger, Thos. H. Dawson, James Gee, Mrs. M. Dodge, Dudley Staples, Rollin L. Rice, Staples & Covell, Z. Mizner.

Construction of a new building was begun and completed for a dedication service which was held on 25 September 1904.

Known for its large, stained-glass windows, white steeple (with the original bell still working) the Whitehall United Methodist Church needed to expand in 1989 to keep pace with the growing community. Improvements were expected to take place in two phases. The steeple would be moved to the new entrance in Phase one with the old entrance becoming a crying room with restrooms and changing facilities as well as a viewing room to see the sanctuary and hear the service. Mens and womens restroom facilities, a new pastor study and a lounge were also planned.

Phase two included a new kitchen, social hall and classroom space and handicap accessibility provided. The old kitchen was converted into a space for office machines and an office for the secretary. Ground for the renovation was broken on Easter Sunday in 1989.

In July 2017 the United Methodist Church of Montague and the Whitehall United Methodist Church merged into one congregation with two campuses.

In 2019 the names of the church were changed to White Lake United Methodist Church with traditional services held in Montague. The Whitehall location was given the name of "The Praise Center" and a more contemporary worship service is held there.