

Methodist Church

Seventy-seven years of history as an independent church, with forty-one ministers--this is the outline of the Methodist Episcopal Churches history in our village but the account in detail of those 77 years and 41 ministers is also the history of many of the families of our village and township.

In March, 1845 just seven years after the official beginning of the Congregational Church, a "class" was formed at the Brown School house northeast of the village. Ten pioneers of five names made it up. Fuller, Sprague, Haner, Robinson and Barrett. Circuit preachers conducted services as they could with such primitive roads and so many preaching points.

Fourteen years later, 1859, Vermontville is made a separate charge. Among the Stewards we find the names of Silas P. Loomis, father of Mrs. E. W. Stevens, also John S. Tyler. Among these original members were Samuel and Wealthy Rogers, grandparents of a member today, Mrs. Joseph Frith.

This first pastor's salary was \$420 and raised by people in eight different preaching points, Vermontville giving a fourth. These were "L. C. Sprague's", Kalamo, Dow Benton, Chester, W. Sunfield and North Benton. Pastoral services spread so far must have been sometimes difficult to render, yet the minister held a high place in the community in point of respect and affection.

The Jordan, Sprague and Hallenbeck families contributed three out of five ministers given from this churches young men.

1865 records the first Sunday School report, with a "bare foot" Sunday School organized at Bismarck. Shoes were scarce and could be worn by many on only special occasions.

At a cost of \$1600 a church was built two miles northeast of the village in 1862. Members living near contributed generously, and when, fifteen years later, the building was moved into the village, some of these sturdy pioneers never reconciled themselves to the event. "They stole our church" said one member. Yet the village proved to be the proper location as roads grew better, and it was the natural center. Two additions to the church, the last in 1927, have kept it modern. Seventy years ago the parsonage was built at a cost of \$700 under the Rev. Thos. Clark. 1872 saw the first regular minister for our village and Bismarck.

These are the highlights of the churches history. Many of these 41 ministers have gone to fields of larger service from here or later. We recall the Rev. E. G. Lewis, who served in Charlotte several years, also the Rev. Ray Merrill, who is now in Cadillac. It is hoped we may append later a list of these ministers.

In 1896 the Rev. J. P. Durham compiled a history of the local church to which we are indebted for many of our facts, and Mrs. Una Moss later brought the work up to date.