

Bethlehem Baptist

From the writings of Anna King Smith

The Baptist Church of Bethlehem, Iowa was organized in the year of 1858 on March 6, with thirteen charter members as follows:

J.M. Bishop, P.H. and Lucy Case (the latter are grandparents of Mrs. Alice Hancock), D.T. Case, Joseph and Mary A. Barto, Mr. and Mrs. William G. Johnson (parents of Mrs. Alice Hancock), S.E. Jones, Jasper Tarr, Nancy Morgan, Jonathan Jones, and Jincy Davis (wife of Henry).

The next year 1859 Rev. Whitehead held a big revival and there were twenty-three accessions to the church, whose names follow; Elizabeth Tarr, S.L. Drake, Lucile Drake, Fannie George, Andrew Davis, W.D. Morgan, John Morgan, Thomas and Nancy Hancock (parents of the late Emma George and Mrs. Jane Davis) Enoch and Margaret Wilcoxon, Margaret Jane George (mother of J.I. Ruddell) J.H. Richman, Mary J. Mason (mother of David Mason) Mrs. Mary Ellen Davis (mother of C.E. and J.C. Davis), Henry Davis, and William George Sr., (father of the late Richard George Sr.) Emily Parr, Amanda Dodrill, Miles and Olivia Davis, Dick and Rachel Given who came from the Christian Church.

Andrew J. Davis and J.A. Harper each served long terms as moderator in this early period.

Some of the early ministers were; William Barnett, a native of Mason county, West Virginia, a pioneer Baptist preacher, who came to Wayne county, Iowa in 1851. He settled on a farm in Benton township, entering his land from the government. He traveled over Wayne and adjoining counties preaching the word of God and organizing Baptist churches. He was ordained in 1853. He was pastor at the Bethlehem church for years. Perhaps as many as thirty years. He once remarked that he had married, baptized and preached funerals of young people, later their children and grandchildren.

In 1851 besides Rev. Barnett there were only two other Baptist ministers in the county. They being Rev. Daniel Winters and Rev. Isaac M. Seay. Then came Rev. Edwards and Thomas, who also were pioneers in the Lord's work.

Another pioneer preacher was Rev. Andrew J. Davis (father of Chas. and J.C. Davis) who with his family removed from Illinois to Wayne county in the 1850's and was pastor here for many years.

Rev. J.W. Bolster, a native of New York state was well known to the Baptist people. He was the father of Mrs. Margaret King. He located in Bethlehem in 1861, and being a carpenter, that same year, he built the old Baptist church. He ministered unto the people until he was stricken by paralysis, which prevented further work among the community people. The old church was remodeled in 1885.

The early ministers were paid in this way, as it was all the people were able to pay. Three dollars in cash and fifteen bushels of oats. Perhaps a few chickens, a sack of potatoes or a bag of corn meal. All were very acceptable to these early ministers.

Bethlehem entertained the Eden Baptist Association in 1862 and again in 1876. Dixon Given was the associational clerk at this time.

In 1905 Rev. Clark, field Missionary held a meeting. The church membership had dropped, services had been discontinued, and in 1923 the last member, Mrs. Eva (Will) Clark removed her membership to the New Providence Baptist church at Confidence, thus freeing the associational obligations, and the church was sold, torn down and another pioneer church vanished from the scene.

"If thou put the Brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shall be a good minister of Jesus Christ."

1st Tim. 4:6.