

# Union Church

Facts and Recollections

by

Ortha Green

In the Records office in Wayne county, Iowa, a deed is recorded in Book 39, page 61. On Sept. 25, 1893 J.R. and Sanora Houk and Joseph Close deeded to J.R. Houk, Joseph Close and Enoch Scott trustees for Church purposes a parcel of land in the north east corner of the N.W., N.E., Sec. 4,69,20, (South Fork Twp) for church purposes. If no church services were held for a period of two years, the property reverted to the land.

The following families helped build and maintain the church. George, William and Robert McMurry and families, Enoch and Riley Scott, John Green and family, Jacob Clark, Joe and Wm. Close, Jacob R. Houk, Commodore Hellyer, Baswell and Wesley Thatcher, Joe Avery, Joe Rhodes, John Mattley, Sumner Leach, Theodore and David Kastner, Nathaniel Webber, Richard Swain, Lincoln and Chas. McIntire, Andy and Dave Hayhurst. Isaac Martin, Mr. Bowman, Eli and Jake Kaster, William Brown and Lysander Kerr.

The first sermon preached was by William Frances Scott. While the church was non-denominational the Methodists were in predominance. The church served the community for sixty years.

In 1953 the church building was sold to Mr. Staley of Cincinnati, Iowa for the sum of \$850.00. The building was torn down and it with the furniture was moved to Cincinnati and built into a beautiful Christian Church. Thus the christian spirit lives on.

The money was given to the Wayne County Hospital Board by Alfred McMurry and furnished a memorial room as "Union Church"

The men cut and sawed wood each fall and the women sold hens to paper and paint the building. Everybody worked and the boys of the community, Roland Green and the Scott boys all helped pick up rock for the foundation of the new church. The building was one large room 40x60 feet with high arched ceiling. There were six high windows on each of the north and south sides. Two windows in the west end, placed far enough apart for a good sized platform or rostrum inside which fitted between the windows. Here the preachers pulpit and chair were located. Two large double doors with a glass transom over each one gave an impressive air to the entrance. A wide porch with four steps on the south and north ends lent depth, being high made it easy to drive a vehicle, buggy or carriage, close so the ladies could step out upon the porch.

A huge wood burning stove sat in the center of the room. Side bracket lamps (coal-oil) gave adequate light, although sometimes lanterns were suspended on wires hanging from the ceiling. Gas lights were installed several years later. An organ was purchased and then a piano was given to the church.

There was a road on the north side of the ground which was the line between South Fork and Wright townships, and a road on the east which was the front

of the lot and building. A driveway extended from the north west corner of the lot, and a chain hitch rack was on the south, east and north sides.

Miss Effie Kerr was the long time organist and Retta and Clara McIntire were musicians and wonderful singers. There were many other lovely singers both men and women. The family who remained faithful until the non existence of the church was George P. McMurry and wife Mary with their sons and families, who made a name for Christian living at Union Church.

The most impressive services of any church were the Revival Meetings, called "Protracted Meetings" (from the fact that they were held for several weeks at a time. if the interest continued good. They were usually held in the fall or winter after corn husking time so the men could attend. The snow was deep, the wind cold, but the room was made comfortable and hot for the people sitting close to the large stove. If the stove could not warm the people the preacher could with his sermons of Hell Fire and Damnation. Their deep religious convictions were expressed in song, testimony and prayer. One devout man Baswell Thatcher was called upon every evening to lead in prayer. He needed no written prayers. Words of wisdom, praise and supplication tumbled forth and there was never any doubt in anyones mind that "Bas" was truly saved and a man of God. I, although a small child used to go to the meetings just to listen to "Bas" pray, and I think his prayers had more influence in converting people than did the sermons.

The songs were of the best, and with Miss Effie Kerr at the organ, one sensed a Spiritual nearness and as the entire congregation joined in singing "Is My Name Written There", you would see that even the worst rogue in the community would get serious. As they continued singing, "When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder" and then the altar call "Just As I Am" gave even the most timid a chance to cry and start forward. Then the organist broke forth with "Coming Home", and the workers went among the people, talking to them about salvation and led many of them down the aisle to kneel and pray.

One of those helpers was Everett Snell, a very devout young man who feared no one. He would go back among the "rough necks", kneel down, pound the floor with his fists and pray for those unsaved ones, telling them of hell and the seriousness of turning from sin to God before it was too late.

Somewhere a man would shout "Amen" and from another corner of the room a sister piped up with "Praise the Lord". Many were the conversions during these meetings.

For many years Prayer Meetings were held each Wednesday eve. During the winter months they were held at some ones home. The first weekly prayer

meeting I ever attended was in the home of Dave and Airie Hayhurst, who lived a mile and a quarter east and a quarter mile north of the Union Church, in Wright township.

The most valuable Christmas ever held at the church was the year of 1912. The 12 foot Hickory sapling was brought to the church the day before Christmas by the men, who promptly set it up in the front of the church and anchored it safely. Then both men and women worked the rest of the day wrapping the branches with white cotton. Then the golden star was placed on the top most branch, and other glittering ornaments along with strings of popcorn and cranberries were hung on the branches. Late in the evening most of the gifts were brought and placed on the tree. There was the usual amount of ties, socks, pins, bracelets and dolls. The tree was decked with ladies gold watches which dangled from their long chains on all sides of the tree. The watches were valued at \$500.00 Almost every family was the proud possessor of one or more watches. My sister Altha and I each received a gold watch from the tree, gifts of our parents John and Jane Green. The tree was guarded all the time until the gifts were distributed.

Another Christmas which stands out clearly in memory was the year of 1904 when the schools close by all went to-gether and put on a cantata, the first one of

its kind in that community. Elmer Black, teacher at Fairview school in Wright township was in charge. Title of the cantata was "Xmas in Tumble Down Alley". Virgil Scott, small son of Enoch and Irene Scott took the leading part. Virgil was a beautiful singer, but he had a heart ailment and that was his last Xmas program. Robert "Bob" Thatcher was the Santa Cluas, and at the proper time he let out a yell and slid down a rope from the attic.

Childrens Day programs in June were always festive occasions with singing, reading and prayers. The church would be decorated with garlands of red and white roses, green asparagus. Sometimes red clover blossoms were twined making long swags around the room hanging gracefully from window to window.

After several years families began to go to the town churches and the number attending at Union church dropped. One minister Rev. Critchlow did much in creating new interest in the old church. He held revival meetings and visited in the homes. One of his favorite songs during the meetings was "On The Other Shore". Every one learned to sing this song, although he did not have any music for it, Eva Hellyer who was pianist at this time soon picked out the tune enough that she could play it whenever the Rev. started singing. All would join in the singing and the old rafters rang with the exuberation of the singers.