

Bethlehem Methodist



Bethlehem Methodist (Photo by Ortha Green)

Information from the writings of Anna King Smith and other sources.

"In 1857 the different denominations partially built a church, used jointly by them until 1861, and it was called Joint Stock Church. The location of this church was a block or so south of the present church. The land was given by Eli Hammer and wife in 1858.

The structure was of native lumber, largely of walnut wood. The seats were of native wood also. They were not benches, but had backs and an arm rest at each end. The building was very plain, but roomy. Two stoves were used for heating. Many people walked miles to attend church services. In making announcement for the evening service the minister would say, "Services will begin at early candle lighting", this being the only method of lighting in those early days."

In 1861 the Methodist people purchased this building and completed it. They used it until 1885 when it was sold. Having no place now to worship they united in remodeling the old Baptist church which was built in 1861.

During the next five years they built another church directly south of the present church. This church burned about 1892 and the entire community was saddened.

On March 3, 1893, William H. Mumma and Charity J. Mumma, his wife, deeded to the trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Lot 40, in block 9 in the town of Bethlehem, Ia. This location was on the west side of Locust Street. (Book 12-Page 491, Records Office).

The membership began to plan for the erection of a new church on the property just obtained.

Charles (Charley) Markley in February 1863 told the following incident connected with the building of the new church. "The men of the community were hauling lumber from Corydon, and John Dotts was on the first load of lumber. He was coming down the "Joe, Joe" hill. The team could not hold back the heavy load, so they became frightened and ran away, overturning the wagon, throwing John beneath the lumber, killing him instantly."

Thus a life was sacrificed for the new church.

Sunday School has always been maintained, and the Ladies Aid is active. Not many years ago someone destroyed the corner stone of the church to obtain the coins enclosed in it.

Some names associated with the early church are; Mumma, Scott, Pumphrey, Ellingsworth, Davis, Ruddell, George, Markley, Hellyer and Thatcher.

Two early day pastors are Rev. Swim and Rev. Coiner. A few of the other pastors are; Rev. Geo. Frame, 1905 -Rev. Sloan 1911 -Rev. Charles Knolls, 1912 -Rev. Harvey, 1913 -Rev. Harvey E. Butler, 1951-2, Rev. Robert Ropp, 1953-54-55 -Rev. Leo Van Etten, 1950 -Rev. Roy Shimmer, 1958, and many others.

The past few years the ministers from Corydon have been holding services at different times.

April 1972, The Methodist Church of Bethlehem, Ia. was sold to Jim Montgomery and has been torn down. This building was erected in 1893. The remaining members plan to build a Chapel and maintain it as a wayside park.

Another Church has passed from our midst in to oblivion, and we are saddened by its passing.