

OUR HERITAGE OF METHODISM IN CAMDEN

In the summer of 1801 Mrs. Esther Park and a Mrs. Harris walked from Camden to Western, a distance of 18 miles, to attend a quarterly conference. There they met with Rev. David Dunham, a circuit preacher, and invited him to come to Camden to preach. He came to Camden that summer and formed a class of five persons. As there was no Conference in these parts, preachers were sent out as missionaries from the Baltimore Conference. Preachers traveled as far as four hundred miles to meet their appointments. In 1803 Rev. William Keith and Rev. Henry Willis traveled the circuit. When the weather was favorable, they visited Camden once in four weeks.

In 1803 a revival was held at which time a number was added to the class, some on Preston Hill and some on what was called the Flat (presently the McConnellsville Road). In 1804 the first quarterly meeting was held in a log barn on Preston Hill. Gradually more people were added to the class.

The first official record was written in 1820. On the first page of the Trustees' Book this pledge was made:

We, the undersigned, having attached ourselves to the Methodist Episcopal Society in Camden, agreeable to the statutes of the State of New York in such case made and provided for the regulation of religious society, as contained in the seventh section of said act, do hereby engage to support the Methodist ministry, agreeable to the discipline of said Church.

*Ezra S. Park
Clerk for said Society*

*Camden, Sept. 10, 1820
Heman Byington
Silvanus Wilson*

In the Brick School House, on Oct. 23, 1820, the trustees were authorized to purchase a site for the house of worship. Since the strength of the society was on Preston Hill, efforts were made to locate the

church there. However, the trustees purchased a site in the village of Camden, and the land was staked out. This land was purchased from Joel Collins for the sum of \$20--fifty feet on a parallel with the public square, containing about twelve rods of land. Another parcel of land was purchased from Abel Collins for \$30, containing about thirty rods of land. This is the land where the parsonage now stands. These deeds were recorded August 12, 1823.

A contract for building the church was made with Joel B. Smith. The church was to be 40' x 50'. Mr. Smith bound himself to have it enclosed and the outside work finished by Sept. 15, 1821. He further bound himself to provide pike poles, sag poles, scaffold poles and ladders. The trustees bound themselves to invite the hands and furnish liquor for the raising. A later contract was made with Joel Smith to finish the inside of the church, for which he was to receive the sum of \$600.

The church was dedicated in the spring of 1823. The building of the church was a great undertaking for the young society, not one of them rich in worldly things, yet rich in faith and filled with zeal for the cause of God. So self-sacrificing were they that some gave their last cow to help pay the church debt.

On Oct. 20, 1827, a meeting of the male members of the society was held for the purpose of incorporating themselves. The society to be incorporated was to be called the First Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the town of Camden, Oneida County, State of New York. This was recorded in the Oneida County Clerk's Office, Nov. 27, 1827, in Book A, Pages 177 and 178.

At a meeting held the next year, rules were adopted to govern the renting and sale of the horse sheds which had been erected at the church. The purpose was to keep the sheds in the hands of the society. The following, in respect to the erection of the sheds, was recorded by Solon Cook:

The society having secured a desirable location for their church and land sufficient for a parsonage, jealousy was awakened in the hearts of some and they conceived a plan to depreciate the value of the site. After the frame of the church was up, the jealous ones had a street surveyed and marked out running south

of the church, dividing the lot, and leaving two narrow strips on each side. This looked discouraging for the young society, but after advising with Judge Stoddard, a number of men went into the woods about three miles from Camden. In one day they felled the trees, hewed them, and framed the timber for a long horse shed. The next night they put it on wagons, drew it to the village, and put up the shed across the east side of their lot. In the morning when the inhabitants of the quiet village were astir, there stood the heavy frame of the shed across the new wished-for street.

In 1831 Camden was made a station at the session of the Oneida Conference in Lowville. Rev. Robert Fox was appointed to Camden. Rev. Eliakim Stoddard was to be the local preacher. In 1833 a campmeeting was held in Florence, which was connected at this time with Camden. The strength of this society could be judged by the following record in the Steward's book: "Sunday, 19th of September, 137 members partook of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper."

The following resolution was passed in 1841: "Resolved, That in the opinion of the members of this Quarterly Conference instrumental music does in no respect tend to the edification or spirituality of the church, nor does it redound to the glory of God or His kingdom on earth, and therefore should not be encouraged." This was thought necessary because the choir leader had taken a violin into the gallery. However, with the passing of time, their songs of praise were led by a two thousand dollar organ.

Up to this time the society had been united and prosperous. The faithful godly men and women had not prayed in vain, for God had been with them. But the time came when a difference in opinion as to the action of the General Conference of 1840, on the subject of slavery, resulted in dividing the church. In 1842 several quite prominent members of the society left the church, and many feared that the old society would become extinct. However, soon after the secession occurred, peace was restored. A religious revival took place, and about eighty were added to the Methodist Episcopal Society.

The first parsonage was built in 1842. Rev. Russell West was the first pastor to occupy the parsonage. In 1844 the society purchased from Thomas D. Penfield a strip of land joining the church property on the

east, consisting of nine rods for \$85.

In 1850 the Sabbath school had 15 officers and teachers and 100 scholars. About this time the old church building was considered too small for the society, so it was sold and a larger building built in its place. The new church building was commenced in June, 1852, and dedicated the 22nd day of December the same year. To complete their new church, the society greatly desired a bell but didn't feel able to purchase one because of the expense in building their new church. Mr. B.F. Sanford of Cincinnati, a former member of the Camden church, learning of their plight, sent one hundred dollars. With this to head their subscription, they soon secured sufficient funds to purchase a bell.

The first ladies' society was organized in 1859 and was called the Half Dime Society.

In 1874 the church received a legacy of \$1,000 from Mrs. Hannah Tuthill as a permanent fund, the interest to be divided equally between the local church and foreign missions.

Rev. C.H. Guile, 1886-1890, was the first pastor to serve under the five-year term. During his pastorate, the church was remodeled. The gallery was removed from the front of the church, the old tower taken away, and a new one built on the southwest corner. An extension was built on the rear, thus giving an enlarged chapel and kitchen.

The Woman's Home Missionary Society was formed Jan. 21, 1891, with twenty-five members enrolled.

The next improvement came in 1893 when the old parsonage was sold and moved to its present location two houses down the street from our present parsonage, and a new parsonage built which is still in excellent condition. George J. Williams, the architect, gave his services, as did T.D. Penfield, who superintended the work. Other members giving their time were E.A. Harvey and H.H. Chapman. Rev. W. Dempster Chase was the first pastor to occupy this new and modern parsonage.

The Epworth League was organized Dec. 28, 1894. Mr. R.C. Knapp was their president for nineteen consecutive years. The Junior League was organized also at this time, and its membership soon grew to

seventy.

In 1897 new oak pews replaced the straight-backed, uncomfortable ones. At this time the free pew plan was instituted. The Ladies' Aid Society purchased four hundred yards of carpet to harmonize in color with the new furnishings.

During the pastorate of Rev. E.H. Joy, 1897-1898, the Annual Conference was held in the Camden church. Dr. Ezra Tipple, a former Camden boy, who was at that time pastor of St. James Methodist Church of New York City, presided.

From 1903 to 1905 Rev. C.C. Townsend served the church, and while here he organized a Sunday School in the Kinney school district.

During the pastorate of Rev. F.L. Knapp, 1906-1910, Camden again had the honor of entertaining the Northern New York Conference.

Some of the older members living today can still remember the Union Evangelistic Service held in a large tabernacle built during the pastorate of Rev. Frederick Maunder, 1912-1915. An unusually large number of converts were taken into the church during this period. At this time the Epworth League increased so much that the doors leading into the classrooms had to be opened so that all might be seated.

Rev. A.C. Loucks, 1916-1918, served through a difficult period in our nation's history, World War I, a time that would be trying for any pastor. The Asbury Circle was formed during his pastorate.

While Rev. N.A. Darling was pastor, 1921-1927, the auditorium of the church received a new oak floor, the walls were redecorated, a new indirect lighting system was installed, and a new piano received. Through the thoughtfulness and generosity of Mrs. Jeanette Sanford, a grand new pipe organ was purchased which is still used today. Miss Carrie Park finished a term of over forty years' service as teacher and Superintendent of the Primary Department of the Sunday School. In January, 1922, an Ushers' Association was formed with Howard Hermann as president.

When Rev. C.G. Roop, a former lawyer, came to Camden in 1927, improvements were continued to the church and parsonage. Rest rooms were installed in the vestibule of the church, the front hall was panelled with oak, and a hard wood floor laid in the hall. Rooms in the parsonage were rearranged, and the pastor's study moved downstairs.

Rev. W.K. Bradshaw was appointed to the Camden charge in 1931 and served until 1936. He found the improved property an excellent incentive for people to attend and worship. The organizational working of the church was improved under his leadership.

During the pastorate of Rev. T.J. Williams, 1936-1942, the church steeple was struck by lightning. A steeplejack reshingled and painted the steeple for the sum of \$150.

Rev. W.H. Bradley came to Camden in 1942 and stayed for seven fruitful years. The social rooms of the church were redecorated during his term. In 1948 the Women's Society of Christian Service gave 250 new hymnals to the church as memorials to Jeanette Orth Sanford.

Rev. Carleton VanOrnum became our pastor in 1949 to find redecorating of the interior of the auditorium in process. The oak floors were refinished both upstairs and in the social room downstairs. The pews were refinished and the organ repaired. A new carpet for the aisles and platform was laid. In 1950 a new rear stairway with outside door was installed to comply with fire regulations. An R.C.A. motion picture machine was purchased for the church visual aid program and to provide the showing of films to the community since the local theater had burned. Two oil heating units were installed. A monthly mailing envelope system was adopted and is still continuing at the present time. Chimes were added to the organ. In 1954 the Walker Memorial Hall was added to the south side of the church at a cost of \$21,073.89. This was consecrated on Nov. 28, 1954. Land at the rear of the Hall was purchased Dec. 23, 1954, from Mrs. Cora Murdough for a parking lot.

In the fall of 1956, during the pastorate of Rev. Allison Wood, our first Every Member Canvass was

conducted nearly doubling the amount of the budget of the previous year with a pledged amount of \$18,854.

In June of 1960 the front of the church was remodeled at a cost of \$2,964.92. In the fall of that year the Official Board met at Camp Aldersgate where a committee was appointed to study and make recommendations concerning the renovation of the sanctuary. At the request of this committee the architects, Finnegan and Gilmour, met with them. To the committee's consternation, the architects suggested the immediate concern should be the unsafe stairways, front and back, to the sanctuary, lack of steel fire exits outside, vibration of the sanctuary floor, deterioration of the supports to the floor and stairway areas, plus the loosening and cracking of the plaster on the sanctuary walls. An estimate of \$35,000 to \$50,000 was given to correct these conditions, plus remodeling the chancel. After much consideration, the committee questioned the wisdom of investing this large amount of money in a 109 year-old structure, which had a second floor sanctuary, inadequate church school facilities, and a limited parking area.

After intensive study it was voted to sell the old structure and build a new one. Many planning meetings were held during the pastorate of Rev. George Dolch and Rev. Stanley Watson. A Cornerstone Club was formed and contributions from thirty-one members poured in. Glen Drake of Osceola gave the first \$100 for the Building Fund. In September, 1963, the Lorimer Rich property on Main Street, where the former Frisbee home stood, was purchased for \$6,000. The Cornerstone Club turned over \$3,800 toward this purchase. In February, 1966, the Howlett property, north of the Rich property, was purchased for \$4,000.

With the necessary land purchased, plans for the new church began to formulate. It was decided to build all three units--the sanctuary, the fellowship hall, and the education wing--at the same time. The Co-Chairmen of this committee were Richard Coe and Edward McDaniels. Other members were Mrs. Homer

Dale, Mrs. Bernard Bogle, Mrs. John Slover, DeForest Morgan, Donald H. McDaniels, Clyde Relyea, Robert Buell, Irwin Brown, Lynn White, and the Rev. Stanley E. Watson, pastor. The cost of the entire structure was estimated at \$300,000. About \$45,000 was on hand from a previous fund drive. The church was designed by Lorimer Rich, a nationally known architect. Plans were approved by the Philadelphia office of the Methodist structure.

On June 5, 1967, a ground breaking ceremony was held. The contract with Mr. Joseph Smith as contractor was signed in June, 1968, and work was begun immediately. On Oct. 20, 1968, the Church Cornerstone was laid with an appropriate ceremony led by the pastor, Rev. Paul D. Mills.

Much credit goes to Robert Buell who worked faithfully as Clerk of the Works, and to Margaret Coe who served as secretary for the furnishings of the new church, all of which were donated. The organ, along with the chimes, was removed from the old building. The chest from the organ was completely rebuilt and electrified. However, the console with pipes was new. From time to time new stops have been added. The steeple of the old church was lifted to a new home, atop the Town Hall. The bell was also removed and placed on the new church.

The sanctuary cross is made of hand hewed timber that is over 100 years old. The beams came from the barn of Glenn Dawley in McConnellsville. It is believed that the barn was one of the oldest buildings in the village of McConnellsville. The beams were given to the church in anticipation that they would be used in the new church.

Since the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church were essentially one in origin, in belief, in spirit, and in purpose, a Constitution was adopted in Chicago, Illinois, on Nov. 11, 1966, by the Annual Conferences of the two churches uniting the churches. The Plan of Union was made effective by the Uniting Conference in Dallas, Texas, on April 23, 1968. After that date the name of the church became The

United Methodist Church.

On Sunday, April 27, 1969, with the blessing of God, a dream had come true. The new United Methodist Church of Camden was consecrated with Rev. W. Ralph Ward, Bishop of the Syracuse Area, giving the sermon, "The Glory of the Church," to a packed sanctuary with some 550 in attendance.

In order to pay for this beautiful edifice, several crusades were run. The first crusade was directed by Rev. Mr. Welch of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church. The church was fortunate to have DeForest Morgan, a very efficient treasurer throughout the whole period, from the time the first money was borrowed until the last cent was paid. The church was also greatly indebted to Florence Skinner Dorrance who left a bequest of over \$50,000 to the church. The monthly payments for the new church were \$1,857.60, but through the hard work of the membership and the generosity of many friends and organizations, this huge debt was entirely paid off, six years ahead of the 20-year mortgage expiration.

During the year 1973 the parsonage was completely renovated, and it was now a parsonage of which to be proud. The old church, with the exception of Walker Memorial, was demolished and a beautiful lawn established in its place. The work on the parsonage was completed with the building of a two-stall garage.

This same year a United Methodist Art Media Center was instituted. The church parking lot and drive were surfaced. A Memorial Garden, completed with the planting of trees and shrubs north of the church, was dedicated in 1976. Many changes had occurred during the ministry of Rev. Paul D. Mills, 1968-1979.

In the spring of 1979 Rev. Raymond E. Linza was appointed to the Camden-Florence Charge. Soon after his arrival, he initiated a Bible Study, which soon grew to over 50 in number, including some from other denominations. A part-time secretary was hired for the church office. The membership of Camden has a history of fulfilling financial support for local programs as well as Conference apportionments. In addition to the current expenses and mortgage reduction payments, new choir robes were purchased for both the

senior and junior choirs entirely through donations. An outstanding feature of the Camden church has been its music ministry. At present there is a Senior Choir of approximately 35 voices, directed by Thomas Voorhies. Mary O. McDaniels holds a record of being church organist for over 40 years.

Thus Methodism in Camden has grown from a tiny seed planted in the hearts of two inspired women back in the year 1801. The seeds fell on fertile soil; Methodism flourished in the small town of Camden and became the church it is today--a church of approximately 650 members. This all came about through the prayers and work of many faithful men and women through the years. However, none of this could have been accomplished but for the help of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. In the words of Martin Luther

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right man on our side
The man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

* * * * *

The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers: let Him not leave us, nor forsake us: That He may incline our hearts unto Him, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and His statutes, and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers. (I Kings 8:57, 58)