

History 1956

As Groton celebrates its 75th anniversary this June 10-12, 1956, the Methodist Church observes its 70th one. Groton was a five year old prairie town in Dakota Territory that Sunday evening in June 1886, when W. J. Hyde, a 22 year old preacher from Canada held the first Methodist service here. The service was held in the G. A. R. hall, a room over a saloon reached by an outside ladder. The pews were planks on nail kegs, and the only hymnal was the pastor's. But, in his book, "Dig or Die, Brother Hyde", which tells of the beginning of Methodism in Groton, Mr. Hyde says, "God was at the service that first night, and the 60 persons present worshipped in the beauty of holiness, though they lacked the beauty of any other appointments."

The previous Sunday evening Mr. Hyde preached a sermon in the Presbyterian church having been invited to do so by Rev. Lean, and that was the beginning of a warm friendship between these two churches that has continued through the years.

Services were held in the G. A. R. hall until the following spring, when the congregation moved to a tent during the warm summer months. When fall came in 1887, the group moved again, this time to a vacated General Store building on main street. Chairs were bought at 25 cents each, and hymn books for 10 cents apiece. A stove was set up for the winter, and when 20 persons were received into the church following a two week's revival meeting, the room was too full for comfort. Hyde knew the congregation needed a larger building, and this time he wanted his own church!

Funds were raised for the building largely by the pastor himself. He spent many days at the Groton elevators, after harvest in 1887, getting contributions from farmers who brought their wheat to sell. Business men gave money also, and before long, a building was begun on the same site as the present church. Among the papers of the church is an itemized bill for the lumber used in the first church, and the amount was \$707.87! The Board of Trustees (who according to the Methodist Discipline oversee a building project) at that time were Messrs. H. A. Bartlett, J. W. Curry, J. M. Graham, Wm. Bowles, B. B. Miller, A. W. Johnson, John Burgard, S. J. Feller, and J. S. Hatton. The articles of incorporation were signed by Graham, Curry, and Axel Johnson. The church was completed and dedicated in August 1888. It was a happy day.

The first parsonage was built later than the church on the land now occupied by the English Lutheran Church. Rev. Charles Sanderson was the first pastor to live in the parsonage. In 1900 William and Della Graham deeded a lot to the church, and the parsonage was built there, where it still stands. No one remembers whether or not the original parsonage was moved and became a part of the present one, or, if the building was sold where it stood. However, the original church building was sold to John Townsend, father of Mrs. Marian Berry, who moved it to his farm north of town. Merle Walter bought this same building a few years ago, and some of the lumber is in the "machine shed" on the Walter farm.

After 28 years the congregation out-grew Hyde's church, and in 1911, the present structure was built. Now again in 1956 there is great need for more space, and a building fund has been started for this new building program.

The Rev. Harvey H. Sander, present pastor, is the 20th man to fill the Groton pulpit. In the early years Annual Conference moved Methodist ministers often. Following Hyde came these men: T. S. Fowler, David Gostelow, John A Ellis, W. Deeble, E. A. McDuffie, Chas. Sanderson, P. Ingersoll, O. E. Butterfield, David Lane, I. C. Lombard, and S. E. Brown, pastor when the present church was erected. These men have their names on the pastors' window. C. B. Harold followed Brown, then Albert Hart, Paul A. Gardiner, Fred Ray, John Norris, L. C. Benson, who was in the same pulpit 19 years, Fred G. MacKenzie, and Mr. Sander. Mrs. Emma Clausen, recently deceased, a member of the church since 1896, and who knew all these pastors except the first five said, "Each one has contributed something of great spiritual value to my life, and I wish I could thank each one personally."

Wesley E. Bowles is the only living Methodist, who became a member when the first pastor was here. He joined the church on "confession of faith" in 1888 at the age of 14 years. All of the Bowles' family contributed much of their time and talents to early Methodist work in Groton. Others active before 1900 were Mr. and Mrs. Axel Johnson, Mrs. Helen Miller, Mrs. H. W. Cassels, Frank Blair, Miss Edith McCann,, Mr, and Mrs. R. W. Bradshaw, and the Reynolds, Steele, Wolf, and Leake families, the latter from north of town, and many others.

There isn't space to write about the chicken suppers begun in Hyde's days, or the ice cream socials added later, and then the monthly suppers, all fund raising projects of the Women's society, which have changed little during the years.

Since this is the story of the beginning of the Methodist Church in Groton, it must end here. Willing hands have taken up the work of the pioneers and the church endeavors to go forward as a community asset in the spiritual qualities of Christ love, justice, kindness, and brotherliness.

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