

History 2006 Updated

As early as January of 1886 the Independent recorded that the M.E. (Methodist Episcopal) were holding a series of meetings in their church in Farmington Township, just east of the Nation (Groton). Perhaps these people contacted the Methodist Episcopal officials to request a minister be assigned to Groton. A quote from the letter written by Dr. A. D. Traveller, presiding elder of Dakota Territory, and received by the president of the college where William J. Hyde was a senior follows: "The church must keep pace with the government in opening up this new territory. This would be a job down at the very grass roots of society..." The president read the letter to Hyde who was eager right from the start to offer his services for work in Dakota. Groton was the place Dr. Traveller had in mind. By July of 1886, Hyde, a 22 year old preacher from Canada had arrived in Groton and held the first service in the Presbyterian Church, The Groton Independent stated. Rev. Hyde had arranged to have services 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. In his book, "Dig or Die, Brother Hyde," 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." Hyde worked diligently in the area with revival services in homes and schools as well as the meeting place.

The Groton Independent reported August 20, 1886; "A Methodist church was organized last night as follows: A. W. Johnson, class leader; S. L. Crockard, J. W. Mallett and J. M. Graham, financial stewards; J. W. Curry, recording steward; and S. J. Fellers, class leader for the school house twelve miles south. All Methodist Sabbath school superintendents are members of the board. One hundred chairs have been received for the G.A.R. Hall to afford seating capacity for the present."

By fall of 1887 Hyde wanted his own church and was almost solely responsible for the fund raising to build it. After harvest, he spent time at the elevators getting contributions from the farmers. Businessmen gave money as well and a building was begun on the site where the Community Center now stands. The itemized bill for lumber and other materials totaled \$707.87.

The Board of Trustees at that time included 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 church was dedicated on December 18, 1887 with Rev. J. A. Stafford, pastor of the first Methodist Church of Minneapolis, delivering the sermon.

Hyde had moved his bed and books to a room in the church on the second floor. The late Lyman Matthews recorded that after Hyde married in July 1888, the hymn singing was greatly improved with the help of the young bride from Canada who often sang solos with no organ accompaniment. Hyde preached his farewell sermon in October 1888 and attended conference in Yankton, not knowing where he would be sent next. The church now numbered 67 members. The first parsonage was built later than the church on land now occupied by Paetznick-Garress Funeral Chapel. The Rev. Thomas 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, just east of the church.

By the 1890's the Sunday School was well organized with officers and an average attendance of 76 pupils and officers. The Epworth League, organized in 1892, entertained delegates from all leagues in the Aberdeen District. The Ladies Aid Society was organized and became a great help to the total church program.

After 25 years the congregation outgrew Hyde's church and in 1911 a brick structure was erected on the same lot. John Townsend, father of Mrs. Norman (Marian) Berry bought the old building and moved it to his farm. Mrs. George Clark (mother of John Clark, Sr.) recorded that the church was dedicated on December 3, 1911, and that morning Dr. Huff preached a sermon from John 12: 24-25. At the close the whole debt of almost \$5,000 was subscribed. The district superintendent and minister from Andover were there too. The Andover minister's theme was "The Kingdom of the World hath become the Kingdom of Jesus Christ."

In the early years, the Annual Conference moved pastors often. Following Rev. Hyde, were T. S. Fowler, David Gostelow, John A. Ellis, W. D. Deeble, F. T. MacDuffee, Thomas Sanderson, P. Ingersoll, O.W. Butterfield, Louis L. Lane, J. E. Lombard, S. E. Brown, C. B. Harrold, Albert Hart, Paul A. Gardiner, Fred Ray, John Norris, L. C. Benson, Fred G. MacKenzie, Harvey Sander, R. P. Nielsen, K. O. Brekke, Larry Moore, John Maines, and John Tyler "Jack" Erickson, present pastor when this was written.

Wesley Bowles, who passed away in 1970 was the last of the members who were here when Hyde was. He joined the church on "confession of faith" in 1888 at the age of 14 years. Mrs. Emma Clawsen, who joined the church in 1896, knew 15 of the ministers and said, "Each one has contributed something of great spiritual value to my life, and I wish I could thank each one personally."

In 1956 when Groton celebrated it's 75th Anniversary a special morning service was held (the church's 70th) followed by a fellowship dinner before members joined all the other churches in the park for a combined service.

The early 50's brought talk among the members and ministers of remodeling or building a new one. The fund-raising for this was started in 1950 when MacKenzie was minister. Members planned a "talent program" based on the parable of the talents. A building plan was eventually selected with Richard Ruden chairman of the building committee and Donald Walter as chairman of the building fund committee. Ground breaking and site consecration took place November 19, 1961, with the Rev. R. P. Nielsen presiding. Land, consisting of a full city block, on which to build had been donated by Mrs. Ethel Ragels. Several other lots nearby were donated by Art Thurston and sold, the proceeds used for the building project. The first stage was completed and consecrated June 17, 1962. Dr. Harvey Sander delivered the morning sermon and District Superintendent, Howard Miller and Bishop Edwin R. Garrison highlighting the afternoon service. The building was declared an educational unity and temporary sanctuary. Jay Swisher was Sunday School superintendent and Merrill Rix was the chairman of the official board.

The second stage, that of a sanctuary was started in 1966 with Robert Wehde, chairman. This part, ready for use April 7, 1968, was consecrated with a morning sermon

delivered by the Rev. L. A. Kruckenberg and afternoon sermon by Bishop Garrison. K. O. Brekke was resident pastor then.

Building of a new parsonage west of the new church was to complete the building program and on October 28, 1970, authority was given by the Groton-Bath congregations. Dr. Robert Snyder and Jay Swisher were co-chairmen and the completed building was consecrated in the spring of 1971, the Larry Moores being the first family to occupy it.

The present name of the Groton Church is Groton United Methodist Church, since 1968 when the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The beginning Methodist Church in the U.S.A. was the Methodist Episcopal church which had a steady growth. Other groups, also commonly known as Methodists and the M. E. Church decided to unite in 1939 and adopted the Methodist Church as a name.

The service of dedication and mortgage burning was held October 4, 1981, with Bishop Edwin Boulton preaching the morning sermon entitled, "Let's Not Pretend." Dr. Kent Millard, Northern District Superintendent, was also present and participated in the mortgage burning along with Gary Thurston, Administrative Council President, and Mrs. Myrle Trask, Building Fund Treasurer. The service was followed by a fellowship dinner. Since then major capital expenditures have involved roof repairs in 1982.

2006 History Update:

The ministers who have served the church after Jack Erickson are: Wayne Tieszen, Dean Trapp, Emil Eberhart, Richard Collman, Grant Piehl and presently, Jan Price.

Major upgrades have included a new Organ, Air Conditioning, New Carpeting, New Furnace, and Extensive Roof Repairs. The Parking Lot has also been chip and sealed.

A memorial provided from the family of Robert Jensen made possible for new glass front entrance doors to our church. Other memorials have provided landscaping for the church yard and trees for the lawn at the parsonage. An addition to the church provided needed space for the Pastor's Study.

Activities the church has participated in over the years include serving and donating for the Banquet (meals for homeless) in Sioux Falls, contributing layettes, health, sewing and school kits, quilts and blankets for the Annual Bishops Ingathering. Sharing in the Groton Community Thanksgiving Dinner, sharing the Christmas Eve offering with selected area friends in the form of Easter Care Packages.

We have also been a part of the Community Hymn fest and shared with several of the local churches to provide Vacation Bible School for all children wishing to attend.

We are part of the World Day of Prayer and assist with donations to Safe Harbor in Aberdeen. Some members have donated financially to benefit our church camps also.

We provide a parking area for and donate to the Goodwill trailer once a year.

A new outreach this year is sending a group of volunteers to assist with meals at the Aberdeen Salvation Army, also new this past Christmas was shoe box gifts for the children at the Spirit Lake Reservation in North Dakota.

We still carry on the tradition of the Annual May Breakfast, the fall Men's Dinner and the Easter Sunrise Service & breakfast.

The church provides a place for several weekly Bible Study Groups to meet.