

THE ISLAND GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

When Illinois became a State on December 3, 1818, it was composed of fifteen counties. Sangamon County, however, was not established until January 30, 1821, by an act of the Illinois General Assembly. It was not until 1849 that the Illinois General Assembly provided for township organization. Each county had the option to organize into townships. Sangamon County did not exercise its option until 1861, at which time Island Grove Township was formed.

Early settlers in Island Grove came from Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia. Later, large numbers of German and Irish settled in the Grove. The early settlers migrated from wooded areas, and were attracted by the timber in the northern part of the township.

Island Grove was eight miles long and one mile in width, extending along a branch of Spring Creek which ran through the northern stand of timber. Surrounding the Grove was rich prairie land covered with grasses and blooming rosin weed taller than a man on horseback. Nestled at the head and foot of the Grove were two Indian villages. Three hundred friendly Indians of the Potowatomie and Delaware tribes exchanged goods with the white man.

As the Island Grove community took shape, the Island Grove Methodist Church was organized. Methodism had strong foundations in the United States, and the Western Conference was the largest conference Methodism ever established. It covered all the territory claimed by the United States west of the Allegheny Mountains. Circuits were established to keep the Methodist flocks banded together, and the circuit found a home in Island Grove in 1822 or 1823. Reverend Price, a traveling circuit rider, established the church.

Island Grove Methodist Church was a circuit appointment until 1849. During the early 1800's large congregations that could support a minister were non-existent in Illinois. The typical structure of the Methodist church was the circuit. A circuit was made up of a number of preaching points guided by an itinerant circuit rider every two or three weeks. Most of the points were located where a class met regularly for bible study, prayer and admonition.

A class leader, either a devout layman or local preacher was appointed to report on the members to the circuit rider. The Island Grove Methodist Church appointed Reverend James Sims as its first class leader, and the members first met in their homes.

Two men were to join the Island Grove congregation, who would help shape its future. Captain James Nicholas Brown and James Douglas Smith left their native State of Kentucky late in the Spring of 1832. Leaving on horseback for Illinois, their object was to find a free territory and a tract of land suitable for new homes. Arriving in Jacksonville, Illinois they boarded a stage for Springfield, Illinois. Part way on the journey they passed through Island Grove and were lured by the timber. Brown and Smith filed for tracts in the Grove through government entry. They returned to Kentucky in 1833.

Being strict Methodists, Brown and Smith were in favor of abolition. Each of the men owned plantations and slaves. But, before returning to Illinois with their families, they freed the slaves.

Abolition was no stranger to the Methodist, and a strong motivation for many Methodist southerners to migrate to Illinois. Anti-slavery sentiment was one of the strongest forces that influenced public opinion when the issue of slavery extension into Illinois was raised. Peter Cartwright, an outspoken leader summed up the Methodist opinion:

"Slavery had long been agitated in the Methodist Church and our preachers although they did not feel it to be their duty to meddle with it politically, yet, as Christians and Christian ministers, be it spoken to their eternal credit, they believed it to be their duty to bear their testimony against slavery as a moral evil, and this is the reason why the General Conference, from time to time, passed rules and regulations to govern preachers and members of the church in regard to this great evil."

Constituting a station by 1849, Island Grove selected Brown and Smith as their station stewards. Peter Cartwright was appointed Presiding Elder and Samuel Elliott was appointed the station preacher. Island Grove boasted a membership of 38 members and six more on probation. A station was a congregation large enough to support a minister full time. Ministerial support was made possible by Brown and Smith's contributions.

The congregation met in a log structure for weekly services. By 1850 the surrounding community was the center of a productive and prosperous farming area. With the advent of saw mills in the area, frame houses dotted the Grove. The Grove boasted several general stores, at least two taverns, two blacksmith shops, one wagon shop, one shoe maker, a flour mill, meat packing plant, hotel, stage coach station, drug store, barber shop, bakery and several doctors.

By 1862 Smith and Brown had amassed more wealth by importing the first shorthorn cattle to Illinois. From 1856 to 1867 the grand herd prize at the Illinois State Fair was won by the Grove Park herds. The two men were able to arrange for the building of a new church structure for the benefit of the community. In 1862 a brick building, made of soft bricks made at a Virginia, Illinois brickyard, was placed under construction. The church had a parsonage for their minister, an adjoining stable, a buggy shed and a long hitching rack.

Island Grove Township was diminished with the formation of New Berlin Township in 1869, but the Island Grove Methodist Church continued with great spiritual success. Twelve ministers served Island Grove Methodist Church from 1849 to 1869. They were: Rev. Samuel Elliott 1849 - 1851, Rev. W. D. Barton 1851 - 1852, Dr. J. C. Finley 1852 - 1854, Rev. W. J. Newman 1854 - 1856, Rev. W. F. Short 1856 - 1858, Dr. A. H. Davis 1858 - 1859, Rev. C. D. James 1859 - 1861, Rev. R. Robinson 1862 - 1863, Rev. James H. Dickens 1863 - 1865, Rev. William McKendree McElfresh 1865 - 1868 and Rev. W. B. Barton 1868 - 1871.

Far from fading as many of the country churches did, with the advent of better roads and automobiles, the Island Grove church remained active. The stables, buggy shed and hitching rack disappeared, but the church remained,

covered with leafy vines in the summer and surrounded by a large carefully attended park. At the sides and rear of the church Woodwreath cemetery is located. The land for this cemetery was donated by James Brown. The name of Brown is seen frequently among the tombstones. The family prospered for generations in the area as did the Smith family. For generations, the Brown and Smith families were prime contributors to the support of the church.

Thirty-eight ministers served at Island Grove from 1871 to 1976. Rev. James H. Dickens 1871 - 1872, Rev. Ira B. Henry 1872 - 1875, Rev. N. R. Whitehead 1875 - 1876, Rev. J. L. Crane 1876 - 1878, Rev. Wm. J. Rutledge 1878 - 1882, Rev. W. G. Dungan 1882 - 1886, Rev. J. Frank Crane 1886 - 1887, Rev. J. R. Van Pelt 1887 - 1888, Rev. M. M. Davidson 1888 - 1890, Rev. John Everly 1890 - 1892, Rev. Chas. T. McKown 1892 - 1894, Rev. W. E. Blair 1894 - 1895, Rev. S. Keplinger 1895 - 1896, Rev. S. W. Beggs 1896 - 1900, Rev. E. L. Darley 1900 - 1901, Rev. Albert H. Flag 1901 - 1906, Rev. O. B. Hess 1906 - 1908, Rev. W. L. Selby 1908 - 1909, Rev. N. R. Johnson 1909 - 1915, Rev. J. O. Lehman 1915 - 1916, Rev. D. E. Johnson 1916 - 1917, Rev. John A. Betcher 1917 - 1920, Rev. John R. Chevvrant 1920 - 1921, Rev. Samuel Graves 1921 - 1922, Rev. James D. Reed 1922 - 1923, Rev. R. N. Johnstone 1923 - 1927, Rev. M. O. Smith 1927 - 1930, Rev. Harry F. Higgins 1930 - 1931, Rev. Delbert Abbott 1931-1932, Rev. Elmer Woods 1932 - 1934, Rev. Geo. F. McCumber 1934 - 1942, Rev. E. R. Cory 1942 - 1944, Rev. D. L. Jeffers 1944 - 1950, Rev. Kenneth Goodell 1950 - 1951, Rev. Vincent Van Horn 1951 - November 1951, Rev. Finiz Maine 1951-1952, Rev. W. G. Montgomery 1952 - 1955, and the present minister Rev. Dr. McKendree M. Blair 1955 -.

On August 12, 1923 Island Grove celebrated One Hundred (100) years. In 1965 the church marked its 103rd year in the life of the present building.

Dr. McKendree M. Blair, the present minister, is the grandson of Dr. William McKendree McElfresh who was pastor of the Island Grove Parish for three years following the Civil War. When Dr. Blair came to the Grove church in 1955, the interior of the sanctuary was just as it was when his grandfather, Dr. McElfresh served the Church.

The ten years between 1955 and 1965 were busy years of improvement. Funds amounting to about \$10,000 for church improvements were secured by the Woman's Society of Christian Service. Remodeling included a basement, gas heating system, tuck-pointing and weatherproofing, newly furnished sanctuary, new piano, electric organ, divided chancel, altar, pulpit, church Bible, new pews, coat racks and offering plates.

Gifts from the Woman's Society of Christian Service purchased a Wurlitzer Spinet Organ, Cable Piano, Christian and United States Flags, carpet, cathedral lamps, and furnishings for the Sunday School. A pulpit was given in memory of Mr. Clinton F. Corrington by Hattie Clarke Corrington. An altar, dosal, cross, candlesticks and vases were given in memory of Dr. William McKendree McElfresh by his grandson Dr. McKendree M. Blair. Offering plates were donated in memory of John T. and Cornelia B. Hensey by the children. A lectern Bible was given in memory of Virginia Whitlock Erickson by Edward J. Erickson. The lectern was given in memory of Rev. D. L. Jeffers, pastor of the church 1944 - 1950. Pews were given in memory of Elmer H. Dunn by Leldon O. Dunn; J. D. Smith I, II, III by Harriet D. Smith; Mr. and Mrs. Sidney (Sim) Yates by the children; Hazel Moxon Scott by Harry Scott and Virginia King; Melvin Paul Walter by Mr. and Mrs.

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Wallace Walter; The Marshall Wilcox family and Albert Wilcox, Sr., Fred and Katherine Koenler by their children; Mr. and Mrs. John C. Lawrence by their children; J. Reuben Keeney by his wife Lillian; Bessie E. and J. Reuben Keeney by their children; and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Taylor by their family and friends. Additional pews were given by Mr. and Mrs. Dan L. Clark and nine pews were purchased with the John H. Keeney fund. Hat and coat racks were given in memory of Howard Rhea Winkler by Mr. and Mrs. Fred Winkler; and J. Reuben Keeney by Mrs. James Blakey. Evergreen plantings at the church entrance were given in memory of John Reichart by Mrs. John Reichart and her daughters.

Tile flooring, ceiling tile, redecoration of the sanctuary, excavation of the basement, gas furnace, tuck pointing, weatherproofing and iron grill work were purchased from the building fund.

Island Grove Methodist Church has remained steadfast in religious faith and spirituality and continues to be a vital part of the surrounding community.

Contributed by

Mrs. John A. (Genelle) McCullough.

NATIONAL GENEALOGICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Several national genealogical organizations have formed a coordinating committee for the purpose of exploring ways of cooperating and coordinating activities and projects in an effort to avoid duplication. This committee can play an important part in directing various activities which eventually will strengthen all participating organizations and further the cause of genealogy nationwide.

Two meetings have already been held. The first was at Salt Lake City during the World Conference on Records and was called by Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern, former president of the American Society of Genealogists. A second meeting was held October 4 in Salem, Mass., in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Society of Genealogists. A third meeting will be held in Atlanta, Georgia in May during the National Genealogical Society conference.

Persons attending the Salem meeting were: Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern, New York; Robert C. Anderson, Mass., and Mary Harter, Florida, representing the American Society of Genealogists; Arlene Eakle, Utah, representing the Association of Professional Genealogists; Richard S. Lackey, Miss., representing the Association for Genealogical Education; Milton Rubincam, Maryland, representing the Board for Certification of Genealogists; Robert D. Anderson, Nebraska, and Arthur Sniffin, New York, representing the Federation of Genealogical Societies; Varney R. Nell and Bill Linder, Virginia, representing the National Genealogical Society; and Lorraine Branning, of the National Archives.

FIRST NGS CONFERENCE IN THE STATES

The National Genealogical Society's 1981 annual conference will be held in Atlanta, GA., Thursday, May 7, through Saturday, May 9, hosted by the Georgia Genealogical Society. This gathering of amateur and professional family history researchers from over the nation will be the first in a series of annual conferences to be held around the country. The meeting will feature addresses by NGS officers and other prominent genealogists, study groups for state and local society officers, lectures and workshops on research methods, and exhibits by genealogical vendors and publishers.

Atlantans Thomas Porter, Georgia Genealogical Society president, and Rita B. Worthy, NGS-GGS liason person, note that the GGS membership is extremely pleased that this conference will be held in Georgia. Porter pointed out that the conference will provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and an opportunity for family history researchers from over the nation to become better acquainted.

Site of the conference is the Century Center Hotel, near I-85 northbound. Contact person for written inquiries is Marie Scheram, 105 Finchley Court NW, Atlanta, GA 30328. Phone contacts are Sam Whigham (404) 255-0725, Eleanor Terrell (404) 478-2784, or NGS headquarters in Washington, D.C., (202) 785-2123.

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