



THE SECOND PRAIRIE CHAPEL CHURCH (above), shown in 1905, was constructed by Redman-Paddock Lumber Co. of Oberlin after the first church was destroyed by a tornado. This church was destroyed by fire of an unknown origin on July 19, 1938. The present church was completed in 1954.

The Sunday School class (below) of Dorothy Chambers in 1962 included (from left, front) Audry Johnson and Joyce Cathcart, and (second row) Cynthia Bogart, Debbie Tally and Nancy Votapka.

Church members will celebrate 100 years of services

By MARY LOU OLSON

The 100th anniversary of the founding of Prairie Chapel Church will be observed on Sunday, Sept. 26, at the church in Harlan Township, northeast of Oberlin.

The worship service at 10:45 a.m. will be followed by a noon meal provided by the United Methodist Women. The DCHS Singers will entertain at a program at 1:15 p.m., which include reminiscing by former pastors and members, entertainment and an anniversary cake.

The church was organized in 1904 by a group of United Brethren workers. They were having Sunday School services at the Locust Grove School, formerly called the Miller School, and the official board included Grant Cathcart, D.J. Coulter, N.E. David, George Welch and John Moss.

The first church building was built by Mr. Coulter on land donated by Mr. David where the church remains today. The first building was dedicated in 1904.

Less than a year later, the church was destroyed by a tornado on May 9, 1905, when William Thompson was pastor.

Ethel Railsback of Oberlin said that her father, the late Clyde Cathcart, told her that he was working in the field southeast of the church and saw the cloud coming. She said he unhitched the team of horses and rushed home and he and his mother, Lenora Cathcart, hurriedly put them in the barn.

The following spring, a new building was built by Redman-Paddock Lumber Co. of Oberlin and dedicated in May.

At times, attendance was so small and the interest so slight that it seemed almost useless to maintain an organization. However, a faithful few, including Mr. and Mrs. Grant Cathcart, Mrs. Frank Arnold, Mr. and Mrs. David, Mr. and Mrs. Coulter, and Mr. and Mrs. Ed Yeakle, kept the church alive.

No matter how few were in attendance, Mrs. Cathcart would say, "Let's have Sunday School anyway."

An old financial report dated Jan. 12, 1910, shows amount raised, \$39.90; amount paid out, \$39.89, balance on hand, .01.

For a short time, the church did close, but it was reorganized in 1922, with the assistance of the Rev. Kipple, the pastor at Kanona. The Rev. Ralph Walters, who came in 1923, was the first regular minister after the reorganization.

In 1925, Prairie Chapel became a member church of the Methodist

Church and the property was deeded to the Methodist conference.

Lightning struck the building, and church furnishings were stolen at one time, but attendance remained high and enthusiasm strong. At one time, Ellen Anthony reported having 60 in her class of young people.

Disaster struck again on the morning of July 19, 1938, when the church was destroyed by fire of an unknown origin. The congregation was once again without a building, but the spirit of Christian fellowship remained. While a new church was under construction, services were held at the Decatur School, a half mile east of the church.

Two months later, a basement was dug for a new church and it was dedicated on Nov. 20, 1938. Services continued in the basement until the summer of 1954.

In 1953, the Rev. O.G. Brown, and Sunday School Superintendent Dorothy Chambers arranged for services in Vallonia School while the present church was constructed on the basement. The church is unique in that each time they had to rebuild, the church was without debt at the dedication.

The first couple to be married in the new building were Joy Cathcart, daughter of Shirley and Bessie (Coulter) Cathcart, and Chuck Votapka, son of Guy and Helen Votapka.

After the Kanona Methodist Church was disorganized in the early 1950s, a number of families came to Prairie Chapel. The church was honored with the Rural Church of the Year Award in 1963 during the conference meeting in Hutchinson.

For a number of years, Prairie Chapel and the Immanuel United Church of Christ of Herndon shared a pastor. In more recent years, Prairie Chapel has been served by the pastor of the Oberlin United Methodist Church.

The Sunday School, United Methodist Women, Vacation Bible School and youth group have been integral parts of the congregation.

Pastors who have served since the 50th anniversary include: Mr. Brown, Wesley Davis, Bob Adams, Omer G. Tittle, James Glover, Dale Clare, H. Gene Shoemaker, Mike Keating, David Randall, Gary Fisher and the present pastor, Doug Hasty.

Five generations of the Grant Cathcart family, which included Shirley and Virgil Cathcart, Joyce (Cathcart) Rippe, and daughter, Alyssa Marie, have been active members of Prairie Chapel.

Present members of the trustee and finance committee are Pam Wilson, Virgil Cathcart, Melvin Smalberger, Bart Snyder, Cheryl Metcalf, Paul Uehlin, Annette Snyder, Virgil Lafferty and Lynn Rippe.

The administrative council includes Tracy Uehlin, lay leader; Nadene Lafferty, recording and membership secretary; Rowena Cathcart, treasurer; Charissa Huff, camping coordinator; and LaVern Rippe, lay delegate to annual conference.

Angie Wilson is pianist and Mrs. Metcalf organist. Mrs. Wilson is president of United Methodist Women; Ethel Railsback, vice president; Phyllis Metcalf, secretary; and Rowena Cathcart, treasurer.

"We started going to Prairie Chapel Church in about 1963," Mrs. Wilson said. "We thought it was important for our children to go to the church their schoolmates were attending and to become more a part of the neighborhood...."

"The determination of the people of Prairie Chapel to keep the church open and serving the community through many hardships through the years impressed us. In the 1960s, one minister gave us about five years before he thought the church would be closed.

"The updating and modernization of the church, putting in water and bathroom facilities, updating the kitchen, remodeling the front of the church, refinishing pews, getting an electronic organ, stained glass windows, made by Coleen Rippe—all these projects with everyone working together brings us closer.

"Prairie Chapel is like family. We enjoy the family nights, picnics, trick or treat for UNICEF, ballgames, and scavenger hunts. I think one of the most treasured things for me is seeing everyone kneeling at the altar to take communion."

Anniversary plates, which show the second and present churches, will be available at the celebration. The public is invited.

"I am excited about serving the Prairie Chapel United Methodist Church as they celebrate 100 years," Pastor Hasty said. "For many, their family history is woven into this congregation. They have a good heritage and a strong faith. It is a delight to be with them.

"One thing I like about the church is that they enjoy getting together for fellowship eight or nine times a year, just because they enjoy being together."



THE PRESENT BUILDING of the Prairie Chapel Church (above) was dedicated on May 30, 1954. It was built over the basement, which had been used by the congregation since 1938. Alyssa Rippe, (below) daughter of Lynn and Joyce (Cathcart) Rippe, represented the fifth generation of charter member Grant Cathcart's family at her baptism in Oct. 7, 1990, at Prairie Chapel.

