



THE METHODIST CHURCH is shown (above) after it was remodeled in 1906. The interior (below) of the Norcatat United Methodist Church can be seen at the wedding of Kay Barnett and Bob Strevey in August 1971.

Church continues to serve Norcatat

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Four former pastors who served the Norcatat United Methodist Church will join the congregation at 10 a.m. worship services Sunday to celebrate 125 years of continuous service to the community.

The most recent pastor, the Rev. Larry Danforth, who recently moved to Cimarron, will conduct the services. Other former pastors include Robert Loomis, Charles Keller, and Ray Gilstrap.

Everyone is invited to a potluck dinner afterward in the Educational Building. Meat, beverages and table service will be furnished, so bring salads, vegetables or desserts.

The beginning of the church came about due to the perseverance of the Rev. Reuben Bisbee, who with his father came from Canada in 1875 and homesteaded in northwest Norton County near the town of Devizes. After his arrival, he applied for and received a local preacher's license from the Methodist Church and began looking around for a place to start a church.

He heard of a Methodist family, Joseph and Rachel Reager, who were living in a two-room sod house. It was in their home, a mile and a half east of Norcatat, that the church was founded in 1885. However, since the soddy was so small, they moved the services to the home of a nephew, Will Reager, who was a bachelor.

Charter members were Joseph and Rachel Reager, J.W. "Worth" Reager, A.P. Coppedge, John and Catherine Dawsey, J.B. and Alice Raymond, Lulu Hughes, Sarah LaSalle, Mary Johnson, and H.J. and wife, O.V. Chapin.

J.O. Osman was pastor when the first church building was erected at the present location, on land given by W.N. Hollister. It was dedicated in 1898. During the pastorate of Bethel Cook, 1919-1924, the Methodist and Christian churches were "federated" and remained as one church for seven years. During this time, membership climbed to 500, balconies were added for more space and a parsonage was built.

In 1960, during the pastorate of Robert Loomis, plans were completed for the Educational Building, which was put up by Nichols Construction of Oberlin, and the church was remodeled.

"I remember in the 1930s, when we had such a large attendance of children for Sunday School, it was held in the parsonage basement," recalled Beth Sebaugh, a long-time member and pianist. "When it was time for classes to be over, Ethel Clark played a march on the organ for the kids to march up the stairs."

"After World War II, the church was so hard pressed for money that Anna Kintigh suggested having potluck suppers on Saturday night for the public and we'd sell the food for 5 cents per helping. It really worked well, and after several weeks, we put the price at 10 cents.

had been church organist and pianist for many years, said to me, 'I'm 55 years old and it's time for me to retire. You take over.'

"I did, and I'm still doing it." She said that when Cecil Zeigler was minister at Norcatat and Lyle, from 1967 to 1972, he organized the *Norcatat News Sheet*, which is still put out weekly by volunteers and mailed to many present and former residents.

In 1976, said Lora Arnold, the Sunday school class taught by Miss Pearl Alexander, decided that they needed to have some cash of their own. Lee Arnold was appointed chair and they decided to have a pancake-and-sausage supper around Feb. 1. Only 38 people showed up on the first cold, stormy night, but they raised \$104 and the supper continued as an annual affair close to Ground Hog Day, with the men serving. The most ever raised was \$600; proceeds went into the Sunday school checking account to be used where the class thought fit.

Later, the United Methodist Women decided to serve a pheasant hunters' supper in the fall and hunters still attend from many states. The women also hold bazaars in October, with proceeds going to the church fund.

Other active groups in the church over the past 125 years have included the youth fellowship and the Quilters.

Present chairman of the church board is Bob Strevey. Other members are Kay Strevey, Darrel and Alice Barnett, Dennis Leichter, Lora Arnold, Bee Nelson and Denise Bailey.

Perhaps the following poem written in 1939 by Ruth Jongema, the new minister's wife, expresses the thoughts of the many servants of God who led the flock of the church during both good and bad years.

Norcatat — 1939

Bleak, bare and laden with dust,

The sad bird's song was hushed,
Paintless houses seemed to weep and sigh

We scarce felt a breath of breeze go by;

How could we live in such a land,

Where all was bleak and covered with sand?

We looked about 'til sunset came,

and then we saw a picture of flame,

A sunset that would make an artist start,

and grab his brush and try his art

at reproducing in colors bold,

of pink and azure, red and gold.

Norcatat became our happy home.

We settled down beneath God's dome

of clear blue sky, and air so pure.

We knew that God was there for sure.



THE EDUCATIONAL BUILDING, right, which was added in 1960 to the Norcatat United Methodist Church, has been used for both church and community gatherings.