

Presbyterian Church History

(Trava Olivier, January 2020)

In 1873 Charles Bennett explored the red rock quarries made famous in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*. He located a site about 1 mile south of those quarries and decided to start a settlement there. He returned in 1874 with Daniel Sweet, Daniel's wife and small child. Both men staked claims, planted crops and were bitterly disappointed when the grasshopper plagues descended and destroyed their efforts. They left for the winter and returned in 1875; the results of that year were the same. Not to be deterred, both men arrived again in 1876. Staked claim to further land and platted the original town site for the community of Pipestone. They left disappointed when the grasshopper plagues again destroyed their hard work. 1877 marked the change. Crops were harvested, the town was ready for settlement and Charles Bennett did his best to spread the word. The spring of 1878 brought settlement to the village of Pipestone. With people arriving, religion was needed.

Reverend Charles Thayer came up from Luverne in October of 1878 and held a service in the Stuart family store that was located on the corner of what is now West Main Street and Second Avenue. Some of you may remember it as the site of Montgomery Ward and Gambles or even the first Loopy's Store. Today the Stonehouse Restaurant sits in that location. He noted that he found a village of 8 families and a few settlers on the prairie. There were 11 people in attendance, and all became the charter members of First Presbyterian Church in Pipestone when it officially organized on November 24, 1878. Those charter members were Charles & Adelaide Bennett (founder of the town and his wife), Dr. George Morrill and his wife and daughter, and Duncan and Jeanette Stuart and 4 of their children. [As a side note the Pipestone County Historical Society does an event in the fall called "Tales from the Grave". We have done this for 5 years and feature the biographies of the early settlers to Pipestone County who are buried in Old Woodlawn Cemetery. Local people stand beside these settlers grave and share their stories. This past fall we featured the story of Jeanette Stuart and her story was portrayed by the Lamb family's foreign exchange student, Ieva.]

In the first years of organization the congregation met in several locations including a small wood frame schoolhouse (added to a home just north of the Episcopal Church Hall), a building owned by Bennett and known as the Opera House [located at 121 west Main St. the second building removed for building the Stonehouse Restaurant], the Bennett family home and finally the original Methodist Church (built and opened for worship in February 1884 and located one block east of here). Sunday School was organized in 1884--even before erecting your first church building in 1885. It was situated on the same site as your current building and cost \$2,700 to erect. Interestingly, the building committee in charge of finding a location chose this site but felt the \$300 for the 2 lots was too much money and tabled plans for the time being. The Presbyterian Ladies group stepped forward and purchased the lots! When the building was dedicated on April 5 of that year, it seated 100 people. In 1886 the congregation voted to purchase a bell. An \$11 down payment was made on a bell that cost \$161. Again, your ladies group stepped up and paid the freight and installation fees. In 1891 your organization extended an offer to the Methodists to use your space for services while they were rebuilding after a fire that completely destroyed their building and all contents. They accepted the invitation.

As the turn of the century dawned space was an issue. From the beginnings of a humble 11 members your congregation was experiencing rapid enough growth that the congregation voted to build a larger

edifice. The original wood frame building was moved to the east and the stone structure you worship in was erected at a cost of \$10,000. The stone came from the Johnson Quarry just to the north of the Village of Pipestone. The record shows your congregation numbered 118 people in 1902. In 1903 a 25th anniversary of the Congregation was celebrated on November 23rd.

Tragedy struck Christmas Day 1911 when a fire broke out from a faulty furnace in the basement. The janitor had been in early to start the fire then returned home as was his custom. The fire spread up the walls and through the ceiling before being discovered. Fighting the fire put such a high pressure on the city water system that several pipes ruptured in the city and had to be repaired. The Sears/Ridgeway wedding scheduled that day had to be held at the Episcopal Church. Regular Sunday services were held at the Odd Fellows Hall [This is the unused second floor space of the So Jos/LC Design building in 2020]. while repairs were made. It was decided to excavate a basement at the same time. This new space housed a dining hall, kitchen and furnace room.

The congregation continued to grow through the teens and 1920s. In 1920 the number of elders increased from 2 to 4. Three years later an additional elders were added; bring the total to 6 to reflect the strength and size of the growing congregation.

The first confirmation class was organized in 1927 and standards were set for church members. Some of the requirements of these standards were to attend at least 1 service each week, make contributions either weekly, monthly or quarterly and do some form of "church work" in the community weekly. The first Vacation Bible School was held in 1928; the same year the church celebrated its 50th anniversary.

1933 the Ladies Aid came through again; this time securing a pipe organ at a cost of \$2,000 from Wicks Organ Company in Highland, Illinois.

In 1937 the Manse, located south of the church was sold for \$1500 and a new manse was erected. The Mankato Presbytery granted permission to mortgage your church for this endeavor.

A Diamond Jubilee to commemorate your 60th anniversary was held in 1938 at the Masonic Hall. It was served by the Eastern Star ladies and long-time members of your church were recognized with a carnation.

In 1939 your church body granted permission to the Public School to use your Sunday School rooms for classrooms in the wake of the fire that destroyed part of the school.

The 40s brought the war and some changes. Each congregant entering the service received a service book, men's meetings were discontinued due to fuel rationing and you partnered with the Methodists to hold weekday religious educations classes together, again due to fuel rationing.

In 1944 Reverend Percy Smith asked for and was granted permission to conduct services at the Presbyterian Church in Jasper. This arrangement continued until the closing of the Jasper Presbyterian Church in 1962. In 1949 a committee was organized to draw up plans for a building addition. The Maas Cathedral Organ Chimes were added to the pipe organ using memorial monies received. As the war ended the flag that hung in the sanctuary was removed. It contained 2 Gold Stars; in honor of the 2 service men from your congregation that were killed in action.

In 1951, with plans in place for an addition, a finance/fund raising committee was formed. They created a special account opened with \$2,000 to start the campaign off. Another \$2,000 was added throughout the year. For the next few years fund raising continued. A 75th anniversary celebration was held with a

banquet at the American Legion Hall. 280 people attended this event; a turkey dinner was served by the Legion Auxillary. Church membership was at 660. On June 17, 1956 an all church potluck was held in the new Westminster Hall. This education building was officially dedicated September 30, 1956. The cost was just over \$100,000. It included 18 classrooms, an office, a nursery, a storage room, rest rooms and a furnace room. I should note this structure was separate from the original edifice. This is important to note because it led to the plans for a remodel of the church proper. In 1962, the northwest doors, the original entrance to the church was sealed off. The original threshold of rough-hewn quartzite quarried from Jasper was brought into the chancel to create a screen for the organ. The sanctuary was turned around and expanded, the addition of the new, expanded narthex joined the 2 buildings. The upper level of the narthex would hold a chapel, office, and study. The basement would see improvements and become a dedicated youth area. The ramp from the parking lot into the narthex was created to make the building handicap accessible. The manse was sold and moved to the Lee DeGriselles farm making way for the parking lot. The total cost of this project was around \$60,000. During this remodel new pews and choir robes were also purchased. Heating and lighting systems were upgraded, and the stained-glass windows received protective storm coverings. The newly remodeled sanctuary could seat 350 people. Membership at the time was 450 with an additional 125 children in the families of those members.

In 1973 the church held a "note" burning ceremony to celebrate being debt free. Late in 1976 a Centennial Committee was formed to plan for the upcoming 100th anniversary of the church. In 1977 the Sunday School rooms were refurbished; the first they had seen since the erection Westminster Hall 20 years earlier. A formal banquet was held at St. Leo's Dining Hall to mark the occasion the centennial.

It doesn't appear as if too much has changed since then. In 1991 stonework at the top of the bell tower was repaired by tuckpointing. This led to the discovery of other much needed repairs. Volunteers members of the church, Burton Keller, Mel Huijbregtse, Gerrit Wabeke, and Glen Eichhorn saved the church thousands of dollars by doing the work. The supporting wood in the bell tower was replaced, the bell that had been leaning to the north was straightened, the bell tower roof was replaced and sloped to drain to the street through gutters and the rotting wooden railing was replaced with a wire railing. The men estimated they spent about 200 hours on this project.

I was led to understand the Pipestone County Museum's quilt display led to the request for this program on your church history. It is true that we have a quilt sewn by your church ladies. We also have negatives from the Pipestone County Star of some of the women seated around the quilt as it was completed and being offered up on a raffle. Other photos in our collections include one of the manse being moved for the parking lot. We have a wedding photo of John and Jean McCallum that originally appeared in the Pipestone County Star and one of Mary Opland, Mary Rauk and Linda Tverberg on stage in the youth area with guitars. We also hold a photo of the original frame church covered in ice after a storm in November of 1896. Objects in our collection include the quilt and a Centennial Plate. Our policy is to preserve objects that tell the story of Pipestone County. The committee reviews each item brought in for consideration and make the final decision. Not all objects are on display due to space considerations. Objects can be viewed by appointment when not on display. The information I used in creating this history came from the archives of the Pipestone County Historical Society. We have files on the churches. In the Presbyterian file I located newspaper clipping, booklets and programs printed by your church for special occasion services and even 3 newsletters that were printed monthly in 1978 for your Centennial Year. It was those newsletters, with several pages of church history typed out inside of each, that really helped my compile this information. I mention it because as parishioner, church elder, or even Pastor; I would ask that when

you create special booklets or programs for special dedications or historical celebrations you consider donating a copy to the archives of the Pipestone County Museum where they will be preserved for future generation of your congregation to look back on and see the rich, full history the Presbyterians have created in Pipestone.

SOURCES:

1. Clark, Rev. LuVerne K., *Centennial Year First Presbyterian Church 1878-1978*, Booklet. Pipestone, MN. 1978.
2. Clar, Rev. LuVerne K., *Centennial Year First Presbyterian Church 1878-1978*, First Presbyterian Church newsletter Vol. 9 (October 1978) pp. 8-15.
3. Minnesota, Pipestone. *Pipestone County Star*, September 19, 1991. (Located in the First Presbyterian Church folder in the archives of the Pipestone County Museum [February 2020]).
4. Minnesota, Pipestone. First Presbyterian Church file. Various unsourced newspaper clippings, church bulletins and photocopies. (Located in the archives of the Pipestone County Museum [February 2020]).
5. Pipestone County Historical Society, editor. *A History of Pipestone County*. Texas, Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company. July 1984.