

First United Methodist Church

Elkhorn, WI

**The history, probably written by Mrs. J. L. Tokes, was first published in 1940 on the occasion of the centennial of the Methodist Church of Elkhorn. Originally called the Methodist Episcopal Church of Elkhorn, the church became the First Methodist Church after a three-way national merger in 1939, and the First United Methodist Church following the 1968 merger with the former Evangelical United Brethren Church. The history is republished, with an addendum, in celebration of the Sesquicentennial, September 16, 1990.

ROLL OF PASTORS

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

ELKHORN, WISCONSIN

J. M. Walker	(In earlier days, ministers often only
G. W. Cotrell	stayed one year at an appointment,
R. W. Barnes	then moved on to another.)
A. P. Allen	
J. C. Dana	
Joshua Tibbals	
D. B. Anderson	
Levi Lee	
R. P. Lawton	
S. Smith	
T. White	
H. B. Crandall --	rebuilt church after the fire
J. G. Pingree	

A. J. Mean

J. T. Woodhead

D. Deal

W. R. Jones – 1872 – the year that Bethel Church was built. In that year, the Conference first published its annual minutes. The Conference introduced Children’s Day and urged all churches to observe it. Elkhorn pastors served Bethel until 1960.

S. Lugg

J. L. Hewitt

J. D. Cole

W. Lattin

T. T. Howard – A lover of fast horses.

S. C. Thomas

N. Aplin – He was an amateur telescope maker, and an owner of a portable observatory.

H. C. Sedwick

J. Schneider

P. W. Peterson

J. N. Trenery

W. H. Summers – The church was encased with brick in 1890.

J. W. Olmstead

E. C. Potter

W. W. Woodside

M. A. Drew

S. Sheard – Two of this minister’s daughters and one son married Bethel people, and

Descendants still live in this area.

J. T. Murrish

J. L. Sizer

Thomas Austin

H. S. Justema

T. P. Hilbourne – He was pastor when the 1923 building was erected.

W. A. Barnlund

W. R. Peterson

W. Wilson

Ernest Kistler

Walter Holliday – 1943-1951

John Bowden – 1951-1957

R. Dean Hancock – 1957-1967

Charles Rossiter – 1967-1969

Carol J. Smith – 1969-1975

Raymond E. Steger – 1975-1980

George B. Robson – 1980-1983

Jeffrey J. Virchow – 1983-1996

Suzanne M. Landis – 1996-1998

Lucinda B. Alwa – 1998-1999

Joel Deaner-Rogers – 1999-2003

Hong-Lim Park – 2003-2012 – wife served as church organist

Lamarr V Gibson – 2012 – 2016

William R. McBride – 2016 - 2019

Anita Lang – 2019 – 2022

Mike Payne – 2022 -

A new church and educational facility was erected in 1964 under the leadership of Rev. Dean Hancock. The 1923 building, now 50 years old, was extensively remodeled and the old sanctuary is used as the church dining room. The new parsonage was built on Edgewood Avenue in 1963.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF METHODISM IN ELKHORN

1840 – 1940

The exact date of the organization of the Methodist Church in Elkhorn seems to be wanting. It is certain, however, that it dates back as early as 1840. This will not be biographies of the living, or memorials of the dead, but the story of Methodism as it is unfolded in the history of Wisconsin.

The religious development of Wisconsin was influenced by Spain, France, Great Britain and America, under whose successive jurisdiction it had been. For more than 150 years, or until 1829, the early inhabitants learned of Christianity from Jesuit priests and Protestant missionary teachers. So far as it is known, the first religious services conducted by a Protestant within the present limits of the state, was at Green Bay in 1820. Dr. Jedediah Morse was sent there by the government on business connected with the Indians, and being a minister of the gospel, he preached once or more while there. It is not recorded that any white man ever visited Walworth County before 1830.

The following is taken from the Butterworth History of Walworth County. "Prior to 1835 the country of Walworth County was in a state nature. There was not a house within its borders, except the rude wigwams of the Indians, and its soil had never been touched by the plow or harrow. Deer in large herds fed upon the prairies." The Aztalon circuit was the mother of all charges in this part of the country and was organized in 1837 and embraced all the settled portion of the territory east of Madison and west of the Lake Shore Missions. These circuits were often changed by the conference.

The first preachers were Rev. Samuel Pillsbury and Rev. Jesse Halstead, and that year, 1837, was one of extended travels and of great exposure. Rev. Samuel Pillsbury was the first minister in Walworth County to be granted his credentials to perform marriage ceremonies. Courthouse records show this under the date of May 18, 1839. During the year appointments were established at Aztalon (Honey Creek), Whitewater, Meachem's Prairie (Town of Troy),

East Troy, Spring Prairie, Elkhorn, some twelve in all. At several of them classes were formed. These classes were Bible study and prayer meetings in homes, and might be called our first prayer meetings. (Brother Halstead's horse became disabled and during a portion of the year, this indomitable pioneer, with saddle bags on his arm, made on foot the entire round of appointments.)

In 1839, Aztalon circuit was divided. The eastern part was called Walworth, the western Watertown. A young man name H. W. Frink was appointed pastor. He filled his saddle bags with clothes and books, mounted his horse as a true knight of the Itinerancy, and was away for new perils and new conquests, on his journey to what was then deemed the wilds of Wisconsin. Without much regard to boundaries it was the work of the Pioneer to find the scattered sheep in the wilderness. To do this he was obliged to undertake long and wearisome journeys, without roads, without bridges, and without shelter, pushing his way through the forest, swimming the streams, and seeking shelter under the over-hanging branches of the trees, in the absence of the friendly cabin.

The first denominational Christian organization in the county was effected by the Methodists in East Troy in 1838. Elkhorn at this early date, being the county seat, also commanded an appointment. Church buildings were not an immediate need. Men and women met for religious communion in many small assemblies, at the larger cabins, and when school houses appeared, these were made doubly useful. In pleasant weather, no finer temples than the oaken groves were needed for the large gatherings. The oak openings, as they were called, had a peculiar fascination for the settlers. Few of them had ever seen the like before. The trees were all old when the first white man saw them. The trees were God's first temples.

After 1843 the county had authorized the sheriffs to let the court hours for Sunday use, at a nominal rental rate, which was later but little reduced by imposing only the cost of heating and sweeping. Not only the churchless sects at the county seat, but all within convenient riding or driving distance, might avail themselves of the liberal disposition, if such sects could agree upon a scheme of days and hours for their several services.

The short pioneer period was followed by immigration at such an increasing rate that co-operative effort was made for church building.

The Methodists, never far or long behind the founders of new communities, pioneered in moral reform. The Abolition of Slavery became one of the tenets of the Methodist Episcopal Church at an early date. The slavery issue caused the church to be separated into organizations, the Methodist Episcopal Church North and the Methodist Episcopal Church South. It seems significant that it has taken four decades to unify the churches. The agitation

of the Temperance question was vigorous at an early date, and kept the churches of Walworth County foremost in the line of reform.

In the year 1852, the Methodist Episcopal Church began its roll of resident clergy with the name of Joseph C. Dana. The first recorded baptism was of Henry Hobart Dana, infant son of Rev. and Mrs. Dana on June 19, 1853. The officiating minister was Alexander P. Allen; the witnesses were Stephen and Abby A. Jones.

In the year 1856, the society, under the guidance of Rev. Levi Lee, erected at a cost of \$5,000, a substantial brick edifice 40 feet by 60 feet with a conveniently arranged basement for Sabbath School, etc., located where the city water tower now stands. The records show that Rev. Lee made the brick for this church and served a congregation of about 100 members without charge. This building was destroyed by fire in 1859.

The Elkhorn Independent files contain a notification that sealed bids for the construction of a brick church would be opened May 1, 1860. There was no newspaper account indicating that a contract was let. Apparently there was a change in plans, as the church records show that a substantial wooden structure was erected. The building committee was Levi Lee, W. W. Beach, and C. Stokes.

The first marriage recorded was July 25, 1858. Richard Andres and Caroline Golder, both of Elkhorn. Place of marriage, Isaac Golder; officiating minister, Rev. S. Smith; witnesses Calvin Golder and wife. In 1864 the conference minutes show a membership of 147, and the Sunday School numbered 250.

This frame building was encased with brick and remodeled in 1890 under W. H. Summers as pastor. In 1900, with Rev. Drew as pastor, extensive repairs were put on the brick church, including new carpets, frescoing, etc. Many of us remember the thirteen angel faces over the chancel. We miss the toll of the old church bell. Church bells have their mission. In time the membership of the church and Sunday School outgrew this church. The trustees had an opportunity to sell the old building to the American Legion, which they did in 1922.

The present beautiful site was purchased from the Dr. Hurlbutt estate. Early in 1923 it was decided to build this brick structure to meet the growing needs of the Sunday School and Church membership. This building has adequately served these needs for 17 years. Rev. T. Parker Hilbourne was the pastor, and we all remember his untiring service. The church was dedicated December 16-17, 1923. Rev. F. J. Turner, District Superintendent; Charles Bayard Mitchell, dedicating Bishop. The building committee was J. L. Stokes, J. D. L. Adkins, I. A. Travis, George Miller, T. P. Hilbourne, Mrs. J. B. Stokes, and Mrs. C. C. Hotchkiss. We are all proud of our beautiful little church in which we are meeting today.

A word in regard to our successive parsonages. The Methodist society first bought a parsonage located on the corner of South Wisconsin and West Rockwell Streets. Later they sold this building to Mrs. Martha Jan Barnes, who moved it on her lot south. In 1982, the society built a new parsonage which is now owned by George Goodrich. Rev. E. C. Potter was the pastor at that time. Our present parsonage stood where our church now stands, and was moved to its present location and remodeled.

The depth of purpose and the vision of these early Christians in their faithfulness and willingness to serve in the several organizations of the church are revealed throughout the church records, while the names of some who worked in retirement are not recorded. They each contributed different talents, some lifting us heavenward in prayer, others with song, some through organization, some teaching, some preaching, some as caretakers of the church, all helping to further Christ's Kingdom on Earth. Can you think of a more compensating work?

As the work of the various church societies is reviewed, the guiding personalities associated with each will pass through your minds, and will you each visualize your own roll of workers? Beginning with the ministry, we think of the Christian gentlemen and their wives, who have given of their strength to serve our church through the years from the first down to our present pastor, who with his good wife have served us faithfully and well for the past three years. We honor and love them.

The Sunday School came with Methodism and has been a great factor in building our church membership. We recall the patient loving Sunday School teachers and workers. Memorizing Scriptural texts formed a part of early training, sometimes whole chapters were memorized. While the early Sunday School teachers had not the advantage of our lesson helps and periodicals, teaching was no harder then, than our re-evaluating and adapting methods to meet the challenge of our modern changing world today.

Our Epworth League is the product of one or two previous young people's societies of the church, adopting its present name from the general society which was organized in 1889. We can recall many earnest Epworth league workers. Our young people have been and are very nationally known College Camp at Williams Bay.

The Ladies Aid Society was organized July 15, 1874, with Mrs. J. L. Hewitt as president. We can visualize work done at the dining hall on the fairgrounds, and financial help rendered in every way by these women. Important as this work has been, the Aid has served in a larger work in building the Kingdom.

The Men's Brotherhood, a more recent organization, is doing a splendid work among themselves and in fellowship with a sister church.

Our W.F.M.S. was organized June 29, 1883, with Mrs. Sedgwich as its president. A Young Women's Foreign Missionary organization was formed about 21 years ago.

In 1912 a Loyal Home Mission Circle was formed with Mrs. R. G. Hoffman as president. Its purpose was to become acquainted with the needs of people in our own country. In March, 1920, at the home of Rev. Justema, this society was re-organized into the W.H.M.S. with Mrs. Harry Howe, President.

Our church was born in Missions. We have these women and the World Service. These societies have continued in earnest service and the very near future will be organized in the Woman's Society of Christian Service. We look forward with new inspiration.

No worship service is complete without song and music. These not only lend a spiritual atmosphere, but proclaim the Gospel most effectively. We have been most fortunate in having members of musical talent, who have given liberally of their time and talent and maintained a good musical program all through the century.

Prayer meetings and revival meetings held a most important place in our early years. The faithful who knelt in earnest prayer before each church service, asking help for the pastor and a blessing on the service. Some churches still continue this practice.

The governing boards of our church have not been as conspicuous in service, but none the less are very important and served well.

One minister, Rev. George Short, now deceased, received his early training in our church. Miss Amy Clowes, who is Professor in Department of Religious Education in North Western University, attended our church and Sunday School.

The ideals of all these church organizations have been carried from generation to generation, but never has the church and the principles for which it stands been more threatened and needed more support than in the year 1940. Yesterday has gone – tomorrow is a dream – we have today, with our unified church. United Methodism has a challenge. Are we meeting it? (1930 merger)

An orator once said, "And now gentlemen, I should like to tax your memory." A member of the audience said, "What! Has it come to that?" I want to tax your memories. I am asking you to rise when you recall the pastors, as I read the roll, in the order of service. 43 pastors have served us the past 95 years, there being no record of the first five years.

(So read at the 1940 centennial celebration. With this re-issue of the church's history, the roll of pastors has been up-dated for the 150th anniversary celebration.)

Addendum to the History of First United Methodist Church of Elkhorn, Wisconsin

Revised on the occasion of the celebration of the 150th Anniversary

September 16, 1990

In 1950 Electronic chimes, installed during the Christmas season, provided music for the downtown area and were so popular that a permanent community project was started later of playing records and organ music each day. The program was originated under the direction of Rev. Holliday.

Rev. R. Dean Hancock announced the separation of the Elkhorn Methodist and the Bethel Methodist Churches July 20, 1959. The two churches had been associated for 87 years.

Rev. John T. Bowden was honored for his ministry of 50 years at a special service in Elkhorn in 1963. He began his ministry in 1913 and retired in 1957, but has continued as a supply minister where needed.

September, 1963 saw the beginning of the excavation for the 50 x 90 foot addition to the First Methodist Church of Elkhorn. Cost of the remodeling is estimated at \$145,000. The new facilities provide a new sanctuary, 13 Sunday school rooms, new kitchen, Church office and foyer, and a combination dining room and fellowship area.

The present sanctuary was constructed in 1964 and consecrated during a worship service on Sunday, October 18, 1964. To make room for the 50' x 89' addition, the old parsonage was torn down and a new parsonage constructed on the northwest side of town on land donated by Mr. E. W. Cleverdon. The new parsonage was \$175,037. The mortgage was retired during a dedication service on November 10, 1974.

In 1980, a dedication service was held May 4th for our new Memorial Chapel by Pastor Steger. This chapel is a reality through the efforts of the following persons serving on the Memorial Committee; Mrs. Beverly Jones, Mr. Duane Katzman, Mrs. Marion Kobelman, Mr. James Betts, Mr. Roy Henderson. Our sincere appreciation for the dedication and patience of these church members.

The Chapel area is 12' x 17' and is furnished with the original Communion table with the Altar ware. The pulpit chair and a pump organ complete the primary furnishings. A new sanctuary lamp and chapel lights and upholstered chairs and carpeting are additions. The Chapel is designed to be used for small weddings and family baptisms and other small groups.

On Sunday, April 20, the first family Baptism was celebrated in the Chapel. Mr. & Mrs. Duane Baerbock, son of Mr. & Mrs. Don Baerbock, had their daughter Jessica Joy baptized.

In 1983, Dr. Sorenson, a member of First UMC, died, leaving a sum of \$25,000 to the church in his will. That money became the foundation for establishing the First UMC Trust Fund. Since that initial bequest, the principal in the Trust Fund has grown to over \$200,000. The interest from that fund has enabled the congregation to continue to expand our ministry and mission to the community and to the world.

In 1983 the church entered into an agreement with a day care provider for the use of a portion of the downstairs as a child care/preschool center. At one time, the Little Thinkers Day Care/Preschool serves more than 35 young children on a daily basis. The day care service ceased use of church building facilities in ...

A new Rodgers Glasgow 740B Organ was purchased in September, 1985 to replace the Baldwin organ in use at that time. The cost of the new organ was 416,883. The Organ Fund was quickly oversubscribed, enabling the congregation to dedicate the new organ on November 17, 1985 with no debt remaining. In ... a keyboard was purchased...

In 1990 the membership of First UMC stood at 308 persons. The current membership stands at 142 persons.

As we look ahead to our bicentennial celebration in 2040, the members of First UMC are aware of the awesome responsibility we have as God's people in this time and this place. We rejoice in the commitment and dedication of those who have come before us. We are grateful to them for their work in building and maintaining a structure where we can gather for worship and find strength and energy to carry our faith out into our community and world. On this occasion of our Sesquicentennial, we, the members of First UMC, renew our commitment and physically and spiritually, so that those who come after us will find here evidence of God's grace and the resources to help them continue to carry out Christ's great commission to "Go forth...and make all nations my disciples; baptized people everywhere...and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you."