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A
BRIEF HISTORY
OF OUR
WATERFORD AREA CHURCHES
by
Ruth Albee

When we speak of the origin and history of our various churches we must ask why they were established; why we shared with so many other denominations; and what of their history throughout the years. The sharing of places of worship, until each denomination could fend for itself, seems to be the common background. Therefore, the early history of each congregation is similar. From the diaries, records, and memories of older members we gain bits of information.

Each newcomer to this territory brought with him an image of his home village with its homes, schools and churches. In the words of Edwin Bottomley (an early settler in the English Settlement) written to his father in England: "We have spent the most interesting part of our lives, the years of our childhood, among you, and many pleasing reflections are associated therewith. It was then that we were taught to reverence the God of our Fathers. We worshipped in the same sanctuary at the same time and were partakers of the same blessings with yourselves. Although we have moved to a far distant land, yet the Institutions and Associations of youth are still dear to us. We still find that we are social beings, and that no temporal advantages will compensate for the want of Christian Communication". Such was the basis of most early churches in the vicinity.

History is made by common men who were determined to better themselves, if possible, in a new land away from miseries of a sort to a different future possible for them by migrating to America. Most of them were poor in worldly goods but rich in anticipation and hope for the future. Most were sturdy in body and mind and came prepared to endure toil and hardship for the sake of their children. Out of necessity, most were forced to build their own homes, raise their own food, and establish schools and places of worship.

All of the churches in this vicinity originated in private homes or public schools, between the years of 1836 and 1869. In most every case the present denomination was preceded by one or more others. The most prosperous one erected a church, or chapel, and the others were welcome to use it for the purpose of worship.

Rochester and Waterford have felt particularly close because at one time we were a geographical part of Rochester Township. It is also recorded that in 1858 and 1860, one pastor served the Congregational group in Rochester and Waterford. Rochester church records show that on March 11, 1860, "The church had a solemn and interesting time while they had the Lord's Supper in connection with the Waterford Church".

In the early days there were two Protestant Church Societies in Waterford--the Congregational and Methodist services were held in the little, red, brick school house, built in 1845 and 1847, where the Graded School now stands. The Congregational Society used the school in the forenoon on Sunday and the Methodists in the afternoon.

On occasion, whenever a meeting was held in the evening, lights were furnished by the neighbors whose best lamps were carried, all freshly cleaned, to the school. The old melodeon from the Chapman home furnished music for church services and other special occasions. The older boys, or men, carried it to and from the school.

If an afternoon service was held, the old tuning fork was often used for the correct pitch. (This melodeon is now a prized possession of the Mealy Funeral Home.)

The Congregational Society must have grown faster than it's neighbor, for in 1859, they erected the beautiful and commodious stone church on the site of the present High School. It was well placed overlooking the town. The basement was fitted for school rooms and took care of the overcrowded brick school.

The light of the Methodist Society, in the brick school, had gone out, and for four years no religious services were held. Then a Christian young man came to teach the public school- James B. McChesney. He reorganized the Methodist Sunday School in his school room. He also invited his friend, W. W. Painter, pastor of the Congregational Church at East Troy, to come and preach occasionally.

In the fall of 1869, Rev. Painter was appointed to the Waterford-Caldwell Circuit. He held his first meetings in his room in the Edward Groat home. As the room became crowded, they moved to the Graded School building which had been built in 1868. Still the interest grew and they were forced to move to the basement of the Congregational Church, and later to the Church itself. Again about 1870, there was a loss of interest due to the lack of a comfortable meeting place.

In 1852, came German settlers to Waterford. Among them were the four Noll Brothers- Louis, Charles, Fred and William and their brother-in-law, Philip Mitsch. They attended the German Lutheran services until the erection of a German Methodist building. From 1854 to 1868, the F. C. Wallman, Henry Brier, Nehls, Joseph and Christopher Topp, Fred Koch, Fred Miller and Jacob Schenkenberg families arrived.

While these families sought to find a church home, several formed a church society and joined the German Settlement and the Blue church. (The Blue church stood in the vicinity of the present Bell School. It was later removed to Beulah Station where it provided a meeting place for the Methodists of that section.)

The German Settlement worship services were held in the homes until a school house was built on the present Highway "D". In the year 1850, Mr. & Mrs. Jacob Treffinger donated a tract of land where the church now stands. A building was erected in 1853, and the present one in 1880.

The Waterford German Methodists continued in their association with the German Settlement and Blue Church until after the pastorate of Rev. Roege, when the German Settlement began to have services in English. The Waterford Society, desiring to continue in the German language, was transferred to the Burlington Circuit and remained with them until the union with the English Methodist Church. They began to have English services under Rev. Schellhause.

Both the German and English Societies continued using the basement of the Congregational Church, and grew side by side.

In 1868, the German Society decided to build a church, during the pastorate of Rev. Conrad Eberhard. Philip Mitsch gave the site at the junction of Main and Racine Streets. (This site has since been deeded to the Village of Waterford with the stipulation that it be used for park purposes only.) Charles and William Noll were the carpenters. The pews, altar rail and pulpit were sawed and turned by George Wallman, then a boy of fourteen, working in his father's cabinet shop.

In their joy and thankfulness at the completion of their new church home they did not forget their friends and neighbors of the English Society. They invited them to worship in their new church.

The English people did not accept their gracious invitation but continued in the basement of the Congregational Church while they planned and worked for their new church. A lot was purchased from Charles Moe, on Main Street. The mason work was done by Daniel Foat, and the carpenter work by Joseph Topp and Charles Johnson. The farmers of the congregation held a "bee" and drew the lumber from Burlington. The dedication was held on December 28, 1878. The building consisted of what is now the central part of our present church with the entrance to the south and the "rostrum" across the north end. The sanctuary was heated with two pipeless furnaces and lighted with kerosene lamps.

The English church was placed either with Caldwell (Prairie), Vernon or the English Settlement. This occasioned quarterly meetings alternating between Caldwell and Waterford, and was anticipated as a day of pleasure.

The union of the two churches was spoken of almost in whispers at first, until in the pastorates of Rev. Wiese and Rev. Sizer sufficient union spirit was developed to hold a few union meetings. These continued through the pastorates of Rev. Wiese and Rev. Staiger on the one side and Rev. Manaton and Rev. Martin on the other. Then came two friends--Rev. Schilpp and Rev. Kistler who were students together at Garrett. They soon had monthly meetings, alternating between the two churches.

In June of 1922, Rev. Kistler resigned. A joint meeting of the German and English Conferences appointed Rev. Schilpp for the two churches as a trial union for the summer months. We were then separated from Caldwell-Vernon Circuit. At the next joint Conference the churches voted to continue as federated churches until September 1923. At that time Rev. Wm. Kurtz was sent, as he had transferred from the Northern Illinois German Conference to the Wisconsin Conference the previous year. This proved very satisfactory because of his ability to conduct services in German when requested. The church went forward as a united church in every way. Incorporation was effected as the "Community Methodist Episcopal Church of Waterford" in 1923.

The original German Church building was torn down and the material used to remodel the English Church during the spring and summer of 1923. Services were held in the High School during the reconstruction. The dedication of the remodeled building took place August 26, 1923.

The seeming magic of combining two old buildings was no less marvelous than that used in uniting two congregations until they were one in thought and purpose--a purpose which had originated among our ancestors many years ago.

An increase in attendance at both Sunday School and church brought a realization that more space was necessary, and in 1954 plans were made for an educational unit. This addition was made in 1958, when nine additional class rooms were added and extensive redecorating was done throughout the church proper.

ST. THOMAS - 1843 Irish settlers visited by Missionaries from Milwaukee
1847 German settlers attended church in Burlington or were
supplied a priest from Burlington
1851 Church built on half block donated by Samuel Russ

ST. PETERS - 1857 Supplied by pastors of St. Johns in Burlington (probably in
a home or public school building)
Met in Congregational Church once a month
Met in Norway Church with a German pastor from Milwaukee
1864 Dedicated first church of their own and joined the Synod

ENGLISH

SETTLEMENT- 1842 Worship services held in private homes (especially the Wm.
Earnshaw home) and the public school
1846 Erected a chapel "large enough for the whole Settlement,
entirely independent of any one denomination with
restrictions prohibiting its being used for any
purpose having an immoral tendency", on land donated
by Alexander Stenhouse
1866-86 Ministers furnished by the "Bible Christian Society"
These were circuit riders who supplied Yorkville,
Rose Hill, Burlington Roads and Burlington
1887 Joined the Methodist Conference
1887-1911 Shared pastors with Waterford, Vernon and Caldwell
1911-30 Shared pastors with Burlington
1930-55 Shared pastors with Waterford
1955-57 Alone
1957 to present Shares pastors with Caldwell

CALDWELL - Congregational (group later joined Mukwonago)
1867 Free Will Baptist Society (supplied by Honey Creek)
Universalist (group later joined Mukwonago)
1869 Methodist Episcopal Sunday School started
Shared church with Baptists on alternate Sundays
German Lutherans also attended as there was no Lutheran church
1900 New church built by Methodists

HONEY CREEK - 1841 Free Will Baptist (open to all denominations)
Building still stands on Wendell Earle farm in village
Pastors served both Caldwell and Rochester

ROCHESTER - 1840 Free Will Baptist with Honey Creek
Met in homes until 1855
1844-48 Congregational
Met in homes until 1855. Then in school house
1885-87 Congregational supplied by Burlington
1868-70 Universalist Church
1901- Congregationalists bought building from Universalists