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THE AMERICAN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1106 SOUTH GOODMAN STREET □ ROCHESTER, NEW YORK 14620 □ 716 / 473 - 1740

A Center for International Baptist Studies

16 April 1984

First Baptist Church
P.O. Box 223
Ionia, MI 48846

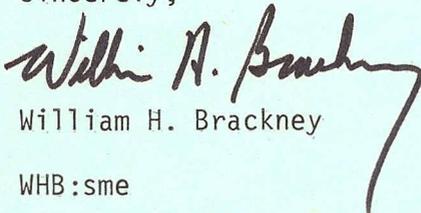
Dear Rev. Pitts:

The American Baptist Historical Society wishes to extend sincere congratulations to you and the congregation of the First Baptist Church on this momentous occasion of your one hundred fiftieth anniversary in the work of our Lord.

This is indeed a special time for your church and we would like to join in the celebration by presenting to the church this certificate signifying your many years of dedicated work in the American Baptist tradition. May God continue to richly bless you as you continue to faithfully serve Him. STOP

If your historical committee has published an historical booklet and/or program, would you please remember the Historical Society with a copy? It would add to our resources and would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,


William H. Brackney

WHB:sme

enclosure



AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MICHIGAN

4610 S. Hagadorn • East Lansing, Michigan 48823-5396 • 517-332-3594

Dr. Robert E. Shaw
Executive Minister

June 21, 1984

First Baptist Church
116 W. Main Street
Ionia, Michigan 48846

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

On behalf of all of your sister churches and our Region Offices we join in giving thanksgiving to God for your 150 years of service in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The celebration of such an occasion inevitably and appropriately prompts us to ponder that expanse of time in all that has been accomplished for Christ's mission. Countless numbers of people have found a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, families have found a place of nurture and fellowship and inspiration, worship services have lifted praise unto God and in so doing have given people new hope and encouragement, lives have become better equipped to be leaders in the community and indeed all over the nation and beyond, through your dedicated finances missionaries have been assisted on every major continent of the globe, so that your influence for the cause of Christ has extended far beyond the place of your location. As a people of God through the years you have shared laughter and tears, triumph and tragedy, victories and discouragement. Certainly the message that should come through it all has been of the faithfulness of God, and the beauty of His Presence to be found in the lives and circumstances of the many people who have formed the procession of your history.

Based on the massive evidence of the dependability of God and the strength of His People evidenced in your history, the future can prove to be even more exciting! Certainly the work of the church of Jesus Christ is not yet completed. The Good News still needs desperately to be heard by many people, lives need to be touched by the forgiveness and healing love of God, families need to find a place where all members can be strengthened and nurtured in preparation for the living of life in accordance with the purposes of God, God's mission around the world still needs the prayers and the finances of God's people in order that all the world may hear of the love of God.

Even as we share in celebration of this occasion with you, we also join with you in the prayer that God shall use your future as mightily as He has blessed your past, and that this time of celebration of your 150th anniversary may be a time of renewal and commitment, revitalization of resolve, and a fresh vision born of His Spirit that shall lead you confidently into every tomorrow. Be assured that my spirit joins with yours in all the dimensions of this celebrative time, even though it was not possible for me to be physically present with you.

In the bonds of His service,

Robert E. Shaw
Executive Minister

RES/plt

Our Church

This building has stood here more than a century now, in dignity and pride
It's steeple reaching up toward heaven, it's doors stand open wide
To welcome a stranger who wanders in, or a soul needing forgiveness of sin.
There are times when this building is filled to the brim
On special days I'm sorry to say, like Christmas time or Easter Day,
But mostly, the same old faithful few, come to sit in their favorite pew
To worship God, to chat with a friend, 'tis a place of comfort, with memories no end.
We come to be filled with spiritual food then go to our homes feeling ever so good,
We have shared each others sorrows, as they have laid a loved one to rest
Also we've shared the happiness of one who's been especially blest.
We have shared in anxious waiting and joy with parents expecting a baby girl or boy
Then placed a rosebud to show our intent, on the arrival of this tiny blessed event.
If these old walls could only speak out, they would tell us a lot there is no doubt.
Of ambitions and plans for a future day, some have matured, some gone astray.
There are those who have come here for wedding vows, then gone on their merry way
But some have made vows to serve the Lord, and year after year they stay.
We come here because we love this place, we're overjoyed because of God's grace,
He holds us all together, in spite of the world's fast pace.
With joy we have welcomed new pastors, with regret we have seen them go
But each has left us a touch of something to love and know.
What---just a building you say, we don't see it that way
And I'm sure we are all in accord, this isn't just a building, my friend
This is the house of the Lord.

By Marian Tingley

By

IONIA — Organizers of Sesquicentennial services at Ionia's First Baptist Church admitted Sunday evening they were "weary" but still excited about the weekend's observances.

David Holliday, general chairman of the 150th birthday anniversary observances, said, "I think everyone ended with a lot of warm feelings about the weekend. I know I did.

"Former members and pastors came back for the celebration and I think everyone enjoyed having them come back, especially those of us who hadn't met many of them. Everything went well in our planning and many of our guests told us how much they enjoyed themselves. A lot of new bonds were formed during the weekend, I think."

ORGANIZED by Samuel Dexter and others on June 24, 1834, a little more than a year after the community of Ionia was settled by Dexter and other original settlers, the church is generally regarded as the oldest Baptist Church in western Michigan.

At services and a social evening Saturday, a special 150th birthday cake for the church, was cut by the two senior women members of the church, Emily Coats Beckhorn, who became a member in 1915, and Helen Morgan Ketchum, who joined in 1923.

Sunday services were presided over by the church's interim pastor, the Rev. Chester Tanase, with participation by former pastors the Revs. Lowell Young, Ivan Estle, William Pixley, John Tennyson and Gilbert Kohler, with the last named delivering the sermon.

THE REV. Roy Pitts, who retired in 1981 after serving the church for seven years, was unable to attend because of illness.

An old-fashioned Sunday school was conducted after morning services by former state Rep. Stanley M. Powell of Ionia, who served as superintendent of the Sunday School for more than 20 years. Powell is also the senior living member of the church, having joined in 1910. He also described how Sunday School was conducted when he was a boy.

Following a 1:30 p.m. banquet Sunday, the church was greeted on its 150th birthday by Mayor Fred Thwaites, on behalf of the city, and the Rev. Robert Nixon of Ionia First Presbyterian Church, representing the Ionia Ministerial Association.

OTHER CHURCH officials expressed sentiments similar to Holliday's on the weekend.

Rod Zeagler, a member of the board of deacons, said, "The weekend climaxed a lot of planning by a lot of church members. I think everyone was 100 percent pleased with the results c"

their efforts. Everything went smoothly and our out-of-town guests seemed happy to be back."

Ada DeBoer, assistant superintendent of the Sunday School, and Jerry Reighard, superintendent, agreed. Reighard said, "We sent out a lot of invitations and I think we were all pleased by how many were accepted. It was just a great occasion for all of us. Everyone got here safely and we hope they all get home safely."

LONG ASSOCIATED with the Sunday School, Ada DeBoer said that "quite a few mentioned to me how well-thought out the weekend was, and how nicely things were arranged.

I thought everything went well."

Social Committee chairman Sue Dearing said, "I don't have an exact count of how many we

served at dinner, but it was between 200 and 210. We had plenty of food and the dinner went well. I think some of us are tired — but we all feel good about it, too."



Sentinel photo by R. C. Gregory

Helen Ketchum, left, and Emily Beckhorn, both of Ionia, senior women members of Ionia First Baptist Church, cut the church's 150th birthday anniversary cake at Saturday evening services.

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▶ REV. MARK H. BOUCHARD
C/O FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
MAIN AND KIDD STREETS
P.O. BOX 223
IONIA, MI 48846

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:
PLEASE CONVEY THE CONGRATULATIONS OF THE AMERICAN BAPTIST
CHURCHES IN THE USA TO THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF
IONIA, MICHIGAN UPON YOUR 150TH ANNIVERSARY. AMERICAN BAPTISTS
REJOICE WITH YOU IN THE CELEBRATION OF THIS SIGNIFICANT
MILESTONE.

IT IS OUR PRAYER THAT REFLECTION UPON THE LONG, DISTINGUISHED
AND EFFECTIVE MINISTRY OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH WILL INSPIRE ALL
MEMBERS OF A NEW DEDICATION TO OUR LORD AND HIS MISSION.
WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE STEADFAST SUPPORT WHICH FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH HAS GIVEN THE WORLD WIDE MISSION OF AMERICAN BAPTISTS.
THIS EFFECTIVE OBEDIENCE TO THE GREAT COMMISSION OF OUR LORD
AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST IS MOST ENCOURAGING.

MAY GOD'S PRESENCE BE FELT IN THE MIND AND HEART OF
EACH MEMBER IN THE COURSE OF THIS GREAT CELEBRATION, SO THAT
EACH MAY BE STRENGTHENED BY GOD'S SPIRIT TO THE END THAT
OUR LORD'S NAME MAY BE GLORIFIED AND HIS KINGDOM EXTENDED.

GRACE AND PEACE,

ROBERT C. CAMPBELL

GENERAL SECRETARY

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES

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MGMCOMP

First Baptists mark Sesquicentennial

IONIA — Ionia First Baptist Church, with a face lift during the past few months, appears as a stop

on the Historic Homes Tour this year — and in June will celebrate an anniversary of its own.

The church, the first organized in Ionia County, will observe its 150th anniversary on June 22.

Founded in 1834, the church is only a year and a few weeks younger than Ionia itself, which was founded May 28, 1833.

IONIA CITY and the church also share a founder — Samuel Dexter, who led a colony of settlers to Ionia from Herkimer, New York, to found the city and county, was also a founder of the church. Dexter was a direct descendant of Roger Williams, the founder of the Baptist Church in America and of Rhode Island.

Sentinel photo by Mark Howe

Ionia First Baptist Church was organized in 1834 — and in June will mark its 150th anniversary in a two-day celebration. The church building, at Kidd and Main Streets, was dedicated in 1872, except for the main entrance which was added some years later. The church has been undergoing a restoration program during the past few years.

(An accompanying article, reprinted from the Sentinel-Standard for June 25, 1934, when the church's Centennial was observed, contains a fair amount of historical background on the church.)

The church, a version of the Gothic Revival style, appears to have been designed, as well as constructed, by Ora Waterbury, an Ionia designer and contractor, and an antecedent of one of the church's current senior members, Stanley M. Powell.

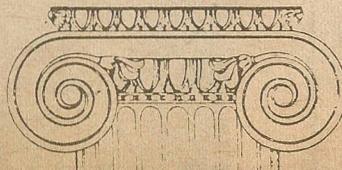
IT IS built of VanderHeyden brick, as are many buildings both public and private in Ionia. It would appear the stained glass windows were installed after the main portion of the church was built. The stained glass windows, in style and designs, seem later than 1872.

Like both SS. Peter and Paul Catholic Church and

Ionia First Christian Church, First Baptist has a tracker organ and three turn-of-the-century tracker organs in one town gives Ionia another unusual distinction.

WELL-maintained by its congregation, the interior of the First Baptist Church has undergone relatively few changes. During the late 1970's and in 1981 and '82, the church underwent a building campaign, adding a Sunday school wing to rear (north) of the church proper and, at the same time, making major changes in the basement social and classroom facilities.

Late last year, the church continued its revitalization activities with thorough cleaning of the exterior brick, masonry repair and other repairs to launch the church and its people into another 150 years and preserve its landmark status.



First Baptist Church marks

150 years

JUNE 19, 1984

First of a Series

EDITOR'S NOTE: When Ionia First Baptist Church celebrated its Centennial in June 1934, the incumbent pastor, the Rev. F. J. Fitch, prepared and read the history of the church at a "historical evening" on Friday evening, June 22.

His essay was reprinted in the Ionia Sentinel-Standard on June 25, 1934, with the following Editor's Note:

"The following history of the Baptist Church was prepared by Rev. F. J. Fitch, and read, with stereopticon views, at the Friday night service."

It is here reprinted again, unchanged except in paragraphing. Editor's Notes, in boldface, have been supplied by R. C. Gregory, Managing Editor.

Washington Center, used as a location in Fitch's first paragraph, was the first name Samuel Dexter, Ionia's founder, selected for his community. The name was replaced with "Ionia County Seat" and, during the Civil War, with "Ionia" because, at that time, another Washington Center existed and duplication was not permitted.

The U.S. Post Office, from at least 1835, appears to have had "Ionia" as its "official" name and the U.S. Land Office always operated with "Ionia" as part of its official name. That may explain why "Ionia" came to prevail as the name for this city and county and made official by the state legislature.

History of the
First Baptist
Church of Ionia,
Michigan,
June 22, 1934

"Washington Center, Ionia County, June 24, 1834. On this, the twenty-fourth day of June, Elder E. Loomis, agent of the American Baptist Home Missionary Society, and Elder L. Slater, missionary at the Thomas Mission Station, visited this place. After sermon and other

religious exercises, six brethren and sisters, Samuel Dexter and Ann, his wife; Alfred Cornell and Nancy, his wife; Erastus Yeomans and Phoebe, his wife, united conference." (Editor's Note: Samuel Dexter's wife's name is usually given as "Anna" (Fargo) Dexter.)

The First Minutes

With this report in the first book of minutes of the church, we have the story of its birth, a pioneer religious endeavor in the midst of a pioneer town. Michigan was a territory then, and Governor Porter was chief executive.

IONIA County did not come into being for a year or more, and although there were smoldering embers, the fires of the "war" between Michigan and Ohio had not yet fanned into flame. Our beloved state was emerging slowly from the wilderness.

Writing a few years before, Rev. Isaac McCoy, pioneer Baptist missionary to Michigan, tells of a proposed trip from Kekellemazoo, now Kalamazoo, to Grand Rapids, says: "This distance is about 120 miles a northeastwardly direction. The whole route will be in the wilderness."

LOOKING back from the vantage point of a hundred years, it is difficult to see our charming little city in its swaddling clothes. The first industry in the city was a large coffee mill, on the front of Samuel Dexter's cabin, which was used through the countryside for the grinding of corn.

In November of 1833, Mr. Dexter arranged his sawmill on Bellamy Creek, and the next year added a grist mill to his equipment. In 1837, the year before Rev. Sangster became the first pastor of the Baptist Church, Mr. Dexter

opened his mill on the site now occupied by the Armory, and the waters of the two little creeks which flow beneath the pavements of the city were united into one at about the point where Dexter and Washington Streets now intersect, and then carried on a flume over Main Street to operate the machinery of the mill.

First Baptism

The next item in relation to the church comes two months later, on August 23, 1834, when Rev. E. Loomis and Caleb Eldred visited the church, and after a sermon and discussions it was voted that the conference should ask recognition as a church.

W. B. LINCOLN gave a review of his religious experience, and the next day was baptized in Grand River. It was at this time that the permanent organization was effected.

History records that this was the first Baptist Church west of Jackson, the first church of any denomination in Ionia County, and the first Protestant church in western Michigan.

Baptist history started in the Thomas Mission, on the west bank of Grand River, in 1822, among the Indians, but when they removed to Gull Prairie, in 1836, the church went with them.

IN A sense our church was the child of the Thomas Mission. Although from June 24, 1834, until February 18, 1837, there was no pastor, and meetings of the church were irregular, irregular, the church has had a continuous history without interruption from the day of its birth.

In addition to the six original members, the church now counted Benjamin G. Barber, who

was received by letter, and Dr. W. B. Lincoln, who was the first physician in Washington Center, later to be called Ionia, as members. Dr. Lincoln was voted in as clerk, a position he held for over 10 years.

Historical Incidents

There are many interesting sidelights in the early history of the church. In February, 1837, the minutes tell us that Candace Dexter was received as a member. This is especially interesting when we learn that Mrs. Dexter was the mother of Samuel, George and Stephen Dexter, and had emigrated from Little Falls, New York, at the advanced age of 75 years.

SHE LIVED in Ionia for 13 years, and is buried in the Dexter plot in Oak Hill Cemetery. Mrs. Dexter was the daughter of Rev. Esek Windsor, who was the son of Mercy Williams (Windsor), who was the daughter of Roger Williams. (Editor's Note: given as "Windsor" here, the name is usually written "Winsor"; it would appear the latter is more accurate, though pronunciation is the same.)

Hence it follows that one of the six founders of the church was a direct descendant of Roger Williams, who founded the original Baptist Church in America at Providence, Rhode Island.

MRS. DEXTER was likewise the grandmother of Mrs. William Jennings Bryan, and the great grandmother of Mrs. Ruth Bryan, who has visited the grave in Oak Hill Cemetery. It therefore follows that our church had a noble beginning, and can claim a kindred relation to the first Baptist Church in the United States.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article continues with the history of Ionia's First Baptist Church as prepared by the Rev. F. J. Fitch in 1934 when the church observed its Centennial.

The first part of Fitch's historical essay appeared in the Sentinel-Standard for Tuesday, June 19, and first appeared in the Sentinel-Standard on June 25, 1934.

Except for paragraphing, the story is reprinted as it originally appeared. Bold face notes have been supplied by Managing Editor R. C. Gregory

The First Pastor

In May, 1838, Rev. A. C. Sangster became the first pastor of the church. He appears to have been an unstable fellow, and there was some discussion a year later as to whether he should be retained for a second year.

The vote was in his favor,

however, and he was on the field until Saturday, May 2, 1840, when the church declared the pulpit vacant. On August 9 of that year, H. D. Buttolph preached in the schoolhouse that was used to house the church, and it was voted to ask the church at Troy, Oakland County, to ordain him, that he might enter upon his ministerial duties in Ionia.

HE FINALLY arrived on the field in October of 1840, and remained a faithful pastor here until 1844. Rev. Alfred Cornell became pastor next. Rev. Buttolph had been a student at Colgate University (in Hamilton, N.Y.) in the Class of 1843, and Rev. Cornell was a graduate of the same class.

Mr. and Mrs. Cornell came on the field in 1845, and remained here for 17 years. Rev. Cornell was the brother of Dr. Alanson Cornell, who came to Ionia in the autumn of 1833, and the uncle of Lucian Cornell, for many years a member and official of our church. Mrs. Lucian Cornell was an honored member of our church for many years, and passed to her heavenly reward in January of this year at the advanced age of 85 years.

Second of a Series

JUNE 20, 19

How He Was Paid

What the salary of the preacher was at this time we do not know, but we find a note in the minutes telling of the appointment of a subscription paper for the support of the pastor.

At the same meeting, August 2, 1845, it was voted to tax every male member one shilling, and female members six cents, for the support of the Gospel, these amounts to be paid monthly.

AT THE same same rate the church at the present time would receive around \$14 per month. It was during the pastorate of Mr. Cornell that the first church house was constructed. Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Dexter had given to the church a plot of land eight rods square on the corner of Main and Norvell Streets to be used for a church and parsonage.

The first building was a frame structure, and stood on this lot approximately on land now occupied by the Defendorf house. (The Defendorf house is now the Court House Annex.) There is some conflict over the first house of worship in Ionia, but one historian states:

"THIS FIRST structure erected and dedicated as a church was the first and only church edifice in this

section of the then wilderness, and for several years continued to be used for all large gatherings and wedding celebrations." The deed to this property is still extant, and contains the well preserved signatures of Mr. and Mrs. Dexter.

In October, 1846, it was decided to rent the pews in the new house of worship, the income from the rentals being applied to finishing the interior. The rentals ranged from \$1 to \$5, the total amount being \$78.38. It was also voted that each person who had taken a seat should give his note payable in grain or its equivalent.

Extends Its Field

John Van Vleck having reported that some people in North Plains were desirous of having religious services there, asked for a license to preach, which

was granted September 1, 1843. (Editor's Note: The Van Vlecks are associated with Palo and Ronald Township; North Plains is given because Ronald had not been set off and organized separately.)

On June 1, 1845, a regularly called council ordained Mr. Van Vleck to the Gospel ministry, and he became the organizer and first pastor of the Palo Baptist Church.

IN 1843, the church was represented at the Shiawassee Association, at its meeting at Perry, and the usual letter and statistical report was read. The Grand River Association came into existence the next year.

Rev. E. H. Morrison of the Class of 1844, of Colgate University, came to the church in 1863 for two years, being followed by a return pastorate of Rev. Cornell for another two years. This made 19 years that Mr. Cornell served the church. In 1868, Rev. Levi Parmely came to the church from Elkhorn, Wisconsin, as pastor. Dr. Alanson Cornell presided as chairman at the meeting which voted to extend the call.

New Church Rises

By this time the first house of worship was deemed insufficient for the work of the church, and plans were made for alterations and repair. A committee was appointed to secure funds, and Orry Waterbury asked to submit estimates for the work.

IT IS inferred that since the estimates totaled some \$3,500, and the committee was unable to raise any funds, that the idea of repair was not acceptable to the church. Therefore, on Monday, June 22, just 66 years ago tonight, the

former motion to repair the old building was rescinded, and a new motion was passed to build a new building at a cost of not less than \$10,000.

In August of that year Rev. Parmely came to the church as pastor at a salary of \$1,000 and parsonage. Benevolence collections for the year amounted to \$100.64 for foreign missions, \$53.75 for home missions, \$100 for Sunday school, and \$4.50 for the Cedar Springs Church. For other objects of a missionary nature, \$35 was raised and paid out.

Baptist Church dedicated in Jan. 1872

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article continues with the history of Ionia's First Baptist Church as prepared by the Rev. F. J. Fitch in 1934 for the church's Centennial.

Two early portions of this series appeared in Tuesday and Wednesday's Sentinel-Standard. The concluding portion will appear Friday.

Except for paragraphing, the story is reprinted as it originally appeared. Bold face notes have been supplied by Managing Editor R. C. Gregory.

ON THURSDAY evening, February 24, 1870, Miss Ella Hutchins, Miss Carrie Hutchins and Lee Hutchins presented themselves for membership after baptism, and were received and baptized three days later.

It Is Dedicated

After considerable discussion, in various gatherings of the church, it was finally decided to let the contract for the church to Brother Orry Waterbury, and that he should complete the work. The second church building thus came into being.

It was like the present building, except a small tower on the southeast corner, and the entrance which was added some time later. It was a happy day in the church life when in 1872 the pastor, Rev. Parmely, preached the dedication sermon on January 7.

REV. E.O. Taylor succeeded Mr. Parmely in 1874.

Rev. John Donnelly came as pastor in 1877. Dr. Donnelly was graduated at

Third of a Four Part Series

Colgate University in 1862, and was given the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1888. He remained for five years and was followed by Rev. Dr. Van Alstine in 1882, who remained four years.

In 1886, Rev. T. Simpson McCall became the pastor. We have a directory of the church published January 1, 1887. The pastor lived at 104 Union Street. Thomas E. Smith, Lucien Cornell, James P. Hart, Walter D. Arnold, Orry Waterbury and E. E. Gates were the deacons.

JOHN W. Baldie was the treasurer, Mrs. Baldie teacher. Miss Emma Arnold was president of the

Children's Mission Band. George H. Allured was one of the trustees and Mrs. Allured was president of the Ladies' Aid Society. Alfred Broad was also a member of the board of trustees. Mrs. Broad was active in church work.

Miss Winnie Hearsey was organist, with J. P. Hart as chorister. Miss Hattie McMullen and Miss Kate Benedict comprised the music committee.

REV. J.J. Phelps followed Mr. McCall, and was pastor from 1889 to 1893, in which year Rev. F. O. Dicky became pastor.

In 1875, J. R. Crispin joined the church at Saranac, later transferring to Ionia. Mr. Crispin was the father of Miss Ethel Crispin, our talented organist, and teacher of the C.C.W. Class.

In 1896, Rev. E. M. Jeffers came to Ionia as pastor, and remained here until 1899. In response to an inquiry as to the whereabouts of Mr. Jeffers, a reply was received from Duluth, Minnesota, saying that he had passed on to his reward at Denver, Colorado, several years ago.

SO WE come down to the dates of the present century. Rev. Duey L. Martin came in 1900 to usher in the new century. To say things about Mr. Martin would be superfluous, for he is here tonight to speak for himself. We are happy to have our friends of the past with us for these few days.

Mr. Martin left us late in 1904, and Rev. E. E. Branch came to enter upon

a 17-year pastorate. (Editor's Note: Rev. Elam E. Branch had both literary and real estate interests in addition to his pastorate. He was an early "developer" of Long Lake and he wrote a two volume biographical album of "leading" Ionia area citizens.)

When he resigned in 1922, Rev. William T. Woodhouse succeeded, but illness severed a happy fellowship in two years, and in 1924 Rev. Alfred Trenerry came from Niles,

Mich., as pastor. Mr. Trenerry remained four years, leaving late in 1928.

In March, 1929, the present pastorate commenced, the nineteenth in the history of the church.

Centennial series reaches 1934

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article concludes the history of Ionia First Baptist Church as prepared by the Rev. F. J. Fitch in 1934 for the church's Centennial.

Earlier parts of the series appeared Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in the Sentinel-Standard.

Except for paraphrasing, the article has been reprinted as it originally appeared.

Many Musicians

We have said nothing about musicians in which quality of genius our church has abounded. We listened Wednesday night to the ladies' quartette from the C.C.W. Class, and we marveled that four female voices could blend so well.

IT IS not the first quartette of women that has delighted our church. Back in the 1890's there was another quartette which sang for years together, two members of which we have with us still, Mrs. Grace Allured Cressy, Miss Winnie Hearsey, Miss Hattie McMullen, and Miss Kate Benedict.

It is impossible to estimate the influence that the church has had on the religious life of the community, the state and the world at large. It has given men to the Gospel ministry, Rev. Alfred Cornell going from Ionia to Colgate University, to return for 19 years as pastor.

REV. JOHN VanVleck, was ordained here, and established the Palo church. Rev. Henry Powell and Rev. Herman Powell went out to long, useful ministries as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Last of a Four Part Series

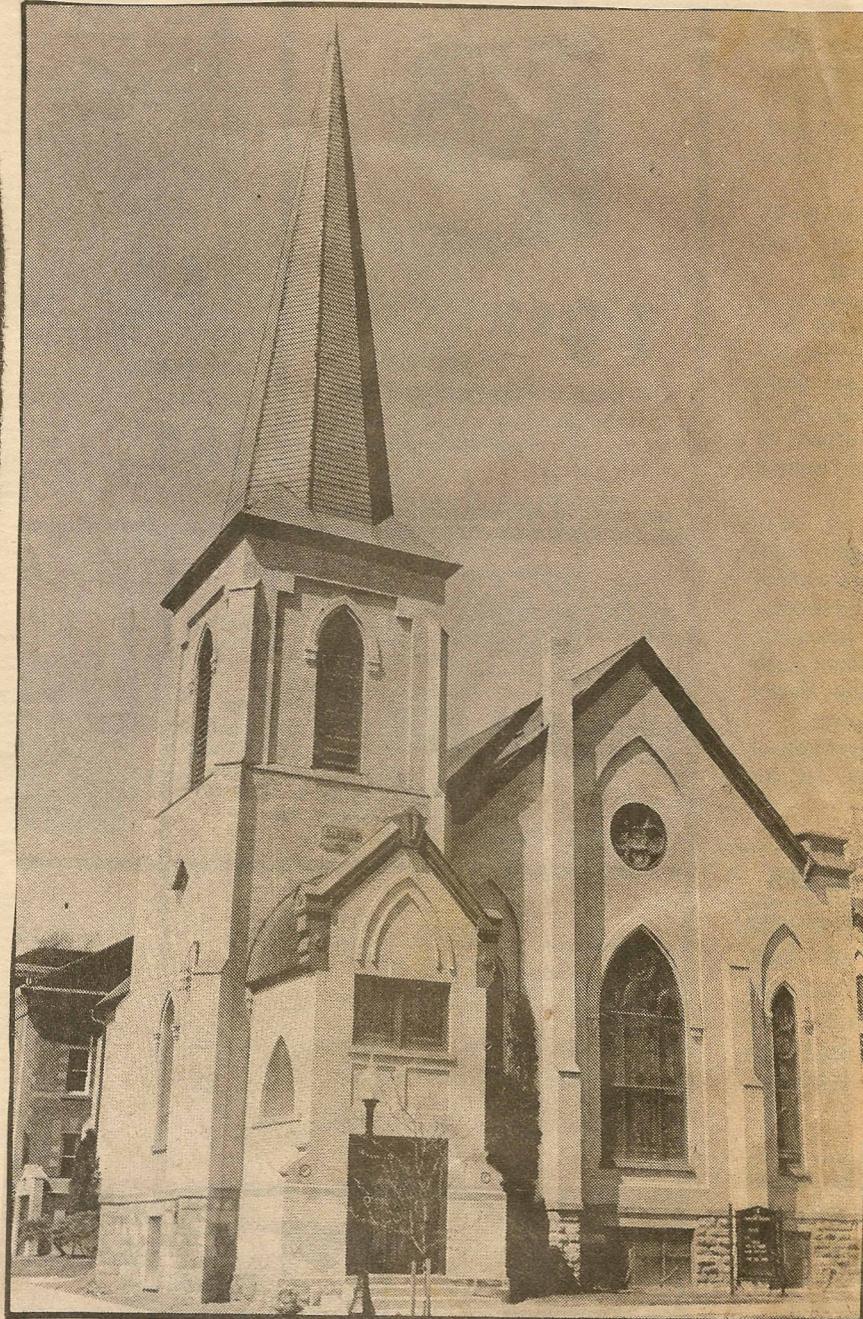
Miss Mary McLean carried the influence of the first church to the Indians under the leadership of Isabell Crawford. Ralph Powell and Mrs. Powell went to teach in (for?) Yale in China.

BUT WHO can measure the work that the church has carried on? Hundreds have passed through its doors to hear the Gospel of the Christ, and have carried away with them inspiration and enthusiasm that has been translated into useful and fruitful lives.

Curtain Is Down

So we come to the end of a hundred years. To use the picture given to us by our speaker Wednesday night, the curtain is rung down. Henceforth the past century is but a memory. The golden rays of the afternoon sun reach their hands up toward the sky, casting a mellow afterglow upon us as we turn our eyes backward to behold the earthly pathway over which our church has come.

AS WE turn again with the glow of yesterday still on our faces, we see that pathway reaching out in the dim unknown of the future. It is the birth of another century. It is the challenge of work not done, of new avenues and new opportunities. It is the outstretched hand of the Christ as He says: "Come with me, and I will make you fishers of men."



Sentinel file photo

Members of Ionia's First Baptist Church begin observances of the 150th birthday anniversary of the church with services this evening. Special worship services, a banquet and afternoon services are planned for Sunday.

Baptists to mark 150th birthday

By R. C. GREGORY

Managing Editor

IONIA — A full weekend begins today for members and friends of Ionia First Baptist Church as months-long planning for the 150th anniversary celebration are realized in weekend services.

Organized in 1834, a year after the Samuel Dexter colony arrived from New York State to found Ionia, Ionia's First Baptist Church is regarded as the oldest Protestant church in Ionia City, Ionia County, and one of the oldest in western Michigan.

Members of the church, led by David Holliday as general chairman, have been planning their Sesquicentennial celebration for months.

"WE'VE BEEN making plans for a long time now," Holliday said, "and I think there's a deep sense of anticipation among church members now that the big weekend has arrived and things have fallen into place.

"Anticipation is the key word, I think. It's exciting for members to know that former members who have moved away are returning and many former pastors are returning."

The reasons for the celebration, Holliday said, "are self-explanatory. The church was organized on June 24, 1834, and we're exactly 150 years old.

"I think the church members in general are proud of their heritage, proud of the role the church has played in the life of the community and are setting aside this weekend to honor that heritage."

HOLLIDAY PAID tribute to fellow

lay members of the church. "An occasion like this also has reminded us of the message, the spiritual meaning, of that heritage. Planning the weekend has been a kind of renewal for many church members," he said. "There's been simply outstanding co-operation and willingness to work on the part of everyone. The celebration is a collective effort by church members themselves."

Saturday evening's observances will begin at 6:30 p.m. with registration for a service and social evening, complete with a "super special" birthday cake for the church, Holliday said.

THE PRAISE and Celebration Service will begin at 7 p.m., in the sanctuary with a welcome from the Interim Pastor, the Rev. Chester Tanase. The remaining order of the service includes:

—A hymn, followed by a historical presentation by Nancy Reighard.

—Special music, to be presented by a "Grandmothers Choir," all of whom are senior women members of the church.

—Uncle Chris and his musical saw will follow, and another hymn.

After the hymn, the congregation will adjourn to Fellowship Hall in the church basement where the Children's Choir will sing "Happy Birthday" to the church.

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THE SPECIAL 150th birthday cake for the church will be cut by Emily Coates Beckhorn and Helen Morgan Ketchum, the two senior women members of the church, who joined in 1915 and 1923 respectively.

After the cake is cut and served, Jerry Reighard will lead the group in old-fashioned games.

Sunday services are in two portions, morning and afternoon.

Sunday morning services will begin with registration and coffee at 9 a.m. in the church lobby. The C.C.W. Class will serve coffee and Mabel Jones and Verona Leslie will act as eeters.

The 10 a.m. worship service will include:

—**ORGAN PRELUDE** and call to worship.

—Hymn of Praside, followed by the invocation and Lord's Prayer, led by the Rev. Lowell Young, pastor of the church from 1966 to 1969.

—Welcome by the Rev. Chester Tanase, followed by announcements and Greetings from the state Baptist organization, delivered by the Rev. Ivan Estle, area minister.

—Responsive reading will be led by the Rev. William Pixley, pastor from 1950 to 1956, followed by the presentation of tithes and offerings, the doxology and prayer of dedication, and special music by Jan Detering.

—**FOLLOWING** the children's message and a hymn, the Scripture lesson will be led by the Rev. John Tennyson, pastor from 1961 to 1966, followed by a pastoral prayer and an organ response and special music by Bonnie VanDeMark.

—Next, the Rev. Gilbert Kohler of Monroe, pastor from 1970 to 1973, will deliver the sermon, "Teach Us To Number Our Days," followed by a hymn, the benediction and a postlude.

After a congregation picture is taken, an Old Fashioned Sunday School will follow at 11:45 a.m.

The Old Fashioned Sunday School will include a hymn, an offering, special music by the Children's Choir, and remembrances by Stanley M. Powell.

Powell, former state representative, is the senior living member of the church, having joined the church of his family and ancestors in 1910.

The church building itself was built by Orry Waterbury Sr., Stanley Powell's grandfather, who also built the Ionia City Hall, the Ionia City Fire Department building, the Morse-Babcock (Moose Lodge) building, St. John's Episcopal Church, and many residences in Ionia and many buildings in both Belding and Greenville.

Powell participated in the church's Centennial events in 1934, and his father was a chairman of events at that time.

A ham and turkey dinner will be prepared by Women of the Church and served to members and guests in Fellowship Hall at 1 p.m.

At 2:30 p.m., the congregation will reassemble in the sanctuary for a fellowship service that, Holliday said, will have a "strong historical element."

Following a hymn, the order of service includes:

—Greetings from Ionia City, by Mayor Fred Thwaites.

—The reading of messages from those unable to attend the celebration.

—Greetings from the Ionia Ministerial Fellowship, by the Rev. Robert C. Nixon of Ionia First Presbyterian Church.

—History of the church by Shirley Zeagler;

—Poem, "Our Church," by Marion Tingley;

—Reminiscing, by the Rev. William Pixley, pastor from 1950 to 1956 and the Rev. Alfred Miller, pastor from 1956 to 1960.

—Special music by Jan Detering.

—Reminiscing, by the Rev. John Tennyson (1961-66) and the Rev. Lowell Young (1966-69).

—A hymn, followed by additional reminiscing by the Rev. Gilbert Kohler (1970-73).

—Poem, "The Aged Strong," read by Ethel Crispin at the 120th anniversary of the church, read by Kathryn Hepe.

—Recognition of members of 50 or more years, including Stanley Powell, Emily Coates Beckhorn, Helen Morgan Ketchum, Gladys Ketchum (1923), Elsie Boltz (1926); Eugenia Boltz Signs (1926), Geraldine Seeley Hoople, Fern Johnson, Minnie George and Mildred Crawford (all 1928), and Kathryn Hepe (1932).

Organist for the services will be Dorothy Horrocks, David Holliday will be song leader, and Carol Manshum and Cindy Holliday will serve as pianists.

Church officials include:

Church Staff: Interim Pastor, Rev. Tanase; organist, Dorothy Horrocks; choir director, Cindy Holliday; song leader, David Holliday; and pianists, Carol Manshum and Cindy Holliday.

Church Officers: Moderator, David Holliday; clerk, Hazel Krywanski; assistant clerk, Mabel Jones; treasurer, Van VanDeMark; financial secretary, Bonnie VanDeMark; church school superintendent, Jerry Reighard; and assistant church school superintendent, Ada DeBoer.

Board of Diaconate: Rod and Shirley Zeagler, Ken and Anita Reynolds, Frank Lance, Gary Martin, Jim Horrocks, Jim McKee, Kathryn Hepe, June Malokofsky, Mabel Nelson and Beth Roberts.

Honorary Deacon and Deaconess: Stanley M. Powell and Mabel Craft.

Board of Trustees: Bruce Boroff, John Hague, Dennis Hague, Steve Fountain and Harold DeBoer.

Board of Christian Education: Chet and Sue Dearing, Nancy Reighard, Shirley Cook, Marcia Fountain and Jan Detering.

Sesquicentennial committees include, in addition to Holliday as general chairman:

Social Committee: Sue Dearing, Geraldine Hoople, Anita Reynolds, June Malokofsky, Earlene Nunes and Cherrybelle Vargo.

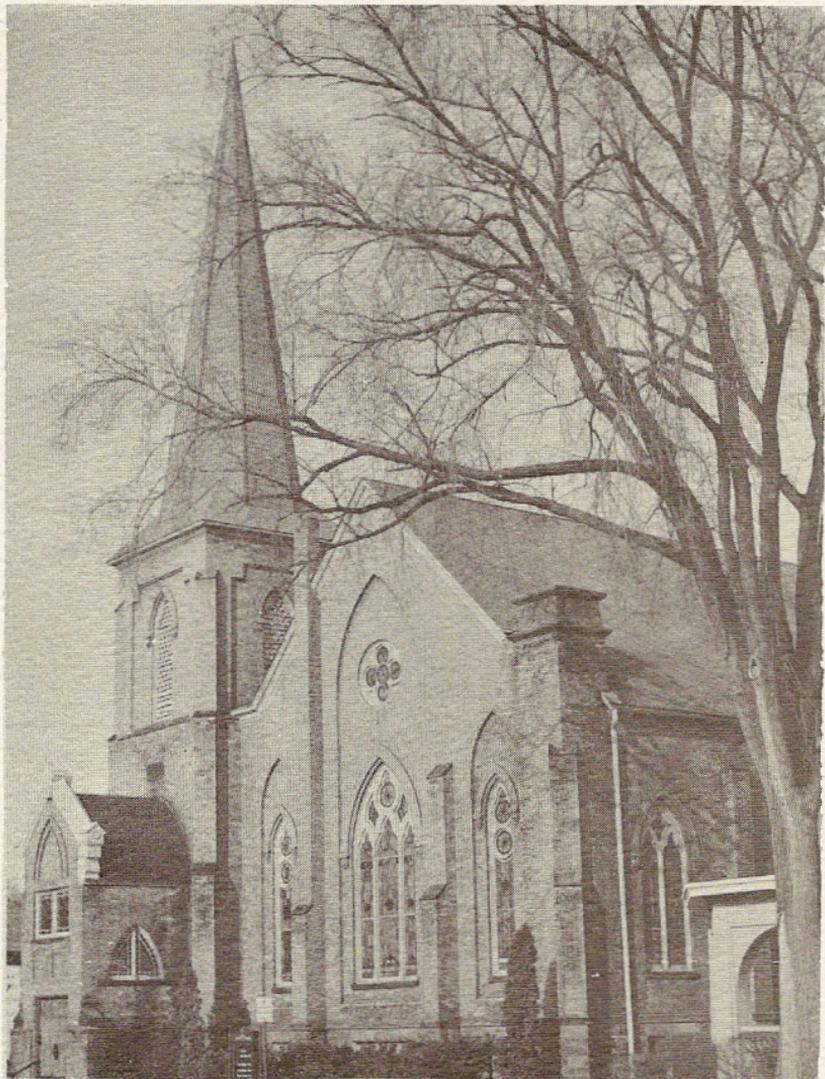
Reception Committee: Beth Roberts, Bob Bailey, Frank Lance, Verona Leslie and Martha Tanase.

Decoration Committee: Cindy Geiger, Jan Detering and Helen Hague.

Publicity Committee: Bonnie and Van VanDeMark, Mavis Townsend, Bruce and Kay Boroff and Paul Leslie.

Program Committee: Harold and Ada DeBoer, Chester and Martha Tanase, Marcia Fountain, Rod and Shirley Zeagler, Pearl Lee and Kathryn Hepe.

Music Committee: David and Cindy Holliday, Janet Kilcherman, Dorothy Horrocks and Nancy Reighard.



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
IONIA, MICHIGAN

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Ionia, Michigan

Serving Christ and Ionia Since 1834

You are invited to help celebrate our 150th Birthday, Saturday and Sunday, June 23 and 24, 1984.

Many of our former pastors are planning to be with us and First Baptist Church families from the present and the past.

Please let us know how many will be planning to attend the Sunday dinner, as the committee needs to make plans.

Last date for reservations by June 15th please. There are no set ticket charges for dinner but donations will be received to offset meal costs.

Plan now to attend and enjoy fellowship and worship with old friends.

150th CELEBRATION EVENTS

Saturday, June 23rd 7:00 P.M. to 8:30 P.M.

Birthday Party Church Basement

Historical Skit Refreshments

Sunday, June 24th

9 A.M. Coffee Hour

10 A.M. Church Service conducted by former pastors

11:30 A.M. Old Fashioned Sunday School

12:45 P.M. Dinner

2:30-4:30 P.M. . . . Fellowship with program and time for
reminiscing.

Reservations to: Beth Roberts
First Baptist Church
P.O. Box 223
Ionia, MI., 48846