

CENTENNIAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

PREFACE

1876—1976



100 YEARS IN THE BI-CENTENNIAL YEAR

I appreciate all the help I was given in writing this history of Centennial Christian Church; without it, my part in our century celebration would not have been so pleasant. I am sure there are many more facts that would have made interesting reading if I had been told about them.

I want to thank Dr. Trueblood for the preface and Dave Brady for the cover picture. Thank you, Mike and Jane Naylor for struggling with my handwritten draft of these pages as you edited and typed them in readiness for the printing. Thanks, too, to Debbie Paris and Betty Burns for proofreading the script.

Maren Pettit

Since Centennial Christian Church will be 100 years old in 1976, we decided it would be interesting to write a story about it. Any story, or history, concerning Centennial has to include the cemetery surrounding it and the Ladies Aid - the cemetery, because a funeral held in the rain was the beginning of an idea for a shelter; the Aid, because it has always been a vital part of the Church since it was organized.

We are indebted to the abstract, to a book "Disciples of Christ in Morgan County", to the printing on the back of the Church plate, and to two old newspaper clippings. We also tapped the memories of some of the older folk in the congregation, and of some not so old. These "rememberings" were welcome additions to what first-hand information I had. We are grateful to all who helped in this way, especially to Kate Teeters and Vonda Shelburne for sharing the clippings, to Paul Vail for a copy of the abstract, and to Bonnie Day for the loan of the "Disciples of Christ" book.

The land on which the building stands, and the cemetery, are described in an abstract brought up to date in 1965. This abstract goes back to an original land-grant by the United States to a James Sims. This was recorded on February 25, 1828. Another part was dated July 6, 1835. These 120 acres were sold to a William Piercey (spelling per abstract) "and his heirs and assignments forever" in 1834. Mr. Piercey bought more land from John Tarleton in 1840, whose title also was an original grant from the government as was the Doty tract.

Other names appearing in the abstract are: Thomas Adams, Daniel Doty, James Shields, William Hughes, Robert Percy, Henry Teeters, Samuel Guthridge, William Prather, James Miles and John Thomas. The latest names are those of Inez (Percy) and husband, Charlie Burns. Where no money is mentioned, it is assumed that the land was a free gift to the cemetery.

I don't know when or where the very first grave was dug, but there must have been some graves there by 1861 because the abstract states that William Percy donated ground for a public burial ground in October of that year. It soon became known as the Percy graveyard, and the southeast corner became the starting place in legal descriptions of the location and dimensions of many pieces of land near there. Even the school, District #8, (across the road and south), used that corner of the Percy graveyard to begin measuring the land donated by Samuel & Mary Percy for that purpose in 1878. The 1861 transaction names John E. Greer, William Wilson, Berry M. Gentry who constituted a Board of Commissioners.

As the need arose, more land was purchased or donated and added to the graveyard. After the Cemetery Association was organized, the Church no longer had jurisdiction of the whole cemetery. It did retain ownership of a narrow piece on the northside of the Church and the area in front on the east extending to the road.

The building now known as Centennial Christian Church came into being in this way: The grandmother of Myrtle Dyer and Margaret Townsend had expressed the desire to be buried under an old oak tree on a hillside then belonging to Samuel Holly Percy. At her funeral, it rained so hard everybody got soaking wet. That night a young man, Tom Radford, drew several plans for a meeting house "so folks wouldn't have to stand out in the rain". His father was so impressed with the drawings that he took

them to show his neighbors. They all agreed a shelter for funerals was badly needed. They preferred the drawing of a rectangular building with two doors and a belfry at the east end. This plan was chosen when the construction of the chapel was actually begun.

Farmers donated timber, some merchants gave necessary hardware, and many folk helped with the labor. The finished structure was covered with clapboards three or four feet long and six or eight inches wide. These were hand hewn from native wood. A fence around the cemetery and hitch rack on the north side were added sometime after the building was finished. When the building was completed, the group then thought about a name. This was the National Centennial year, 1876, so they decided to call it the Centennial Chapel. A plaque with the name and the year 1876 was nailed up in the center and above the doors. In April of that year, Samuel H. Percy and wife and William Hughes and wife Jemima donated the land on which the Chapel stood to the trustees who were not named in the abstract. The next August a ceremony of dedication was held. It was considered a meeting place for all denominations but was used chiefly for funerals.

While the local residents had undertaken the building of the Chapel, it is evident that it was controlled by a Baptist group for a time, at least. The abstract shows that in 1894 the Clear Creek Predestinarian Baptist Church deeded the property to the Centennial Chapel, and had a contract with them whereby it was to have the use of the building on the second Saturday and following Sunday of each month for worship services. This contract is binding to this day, although it has been many years since they have exercised their right.

In checking with the Disciples of Christ book (written in 1939) we learned that "... for a few years after the Baptists ceased to exist in the community, this particular association of churches would return each summer to hold a camp meeting in the building. The rest of the year, the Church was free to those who cared to use it".

As early as 1901 Sunday School and Bible Study were held in the Chapel, usually in the afternoon. Names prominent during this period were Joseph St. John, W. C. Hine, and John P. Badgely.

For a long time the Chapel was heated by two big Wilson heaters. Farmers cut wood from their own wood lots to stoke the heaters. There were benches and theatre type seats, bare floors, no curtains, and kerosene lamps. The steps across the east end and small platforms were later replaced by a larger one.



After a hundred years, the original doors and windows are still in use.

It seems there were Sunday School and Bible Studies held in the Chapel off and on in the period following this until 1921.

The following is a direct quote from an item appearing in the Reporter of August 21, 1921. "On Sabbath last, we attended the dedication of Centennial Chapel in Green Township, some six miles east of Martinsville. The little Church, built of frame, can be seen from a distance of two miles from the southeast and five miles from the northwest. It is actually the poet, Goldsmith's ideal when he expressed in his Deserted Village "The lovely Church that topped the neighboring hill". The dedicatory services were performed by the Revs. S. L. Brinkley, James Ritchey, and J. Braunstatter. The former outdid himself in eloquence and oratory. The second was the same good old man as we all know him. The latter is from Southport, a suburb of Indianapolis where he preaches in behalf of the M. E. Church, South."

"Notwithstanding the untoward circumstances attending the scene, there were 2000 people upon the grounds, and the good housewives and their no less excellent daughters are to be praised for feeding, with such nutritious food, the hungry. In fact, the excellent dinner was spread free for all."

Trustees of the Church were: H. Teeters, R. H. Percy, W. H. Percy, Wm. Hammans, and Wm. Radford".

In 1924, a Union Sunday School was organized, Howard Lee Masters being the recognized leader. Three years later, in the Fall, the Sunday School called Rev. H. B. Burns, a Baptist minister from Gosport, to hold a revival. At this time, there were 37 members - 5 added during the revival.

A Christian Church was organized with Bro. Charley Ellis, an elder in the Martinsville Church, assisting Rev. Burns in the election of officers.

Walter St. John and Amber Devore were elders; Glenna Gray, clerk; Henry Tackett, Harry Percy, Lester Gray, Louis Scott and Roy Goss were the elected deacons.

Following Burns' ministry, those serving as pastors at Centennial were: Wales Smith, Orval Ennis, Eugene Timbrook, Bro. Swanner, Bro. Hamilton, H. B. Burns again, Bro. Thomas, Frank Krueger, Ralph Spencer, Wendell Turner, Charles Kraus, Stanley Carpenter, Robert Vorse, Jerry Lynch, Felix Walker and the present minister, Mike Naylor. Bro. Naylor came to the Church in January of 1975.

Somewhere along the line, the bell was silent for several years because it had a tendency to "stick" in an upside down position. Somebody had to climb up into the belfry to right it everytime it was to be rung. Later it was thought the sustaining framework had rotted, and it was not safe to ring the bell. At this writing, it is rung every Sunday morning. The Sunday School classes begin at 9:30. Two classes meet upstairs, three in the basement. Mike McFarland is Superintendent, Grace Schaffauser is assistant. Mike and Jane Naylor teach the young adults, Maren Pettit the older adults, Joe Arndt has the teens, Marjorie Conaway teaches the pre-schoolers and Sadie Percy the elementary ages.

Besides his Sunday sermons and teaching his Sunday School class, Mike Naylor has a short Bible teaching session with the youngest children right after the Lord's Supper. He has begun Bible Study on Monday nights and leads the Youth in their gatherings on Thursday nights.

Marilyn Arndt is the regular pianist, Jane Naylor, Brenda McFarland and Bonnie Day substitute when necessary.

Don Rodgers is Chairman of the Board. Joe Arndt and Jack Wells are the Elders. Paul Vail is Treasurer and Brenda McFarland is Secretary.

Trustees are Paul Vail, Jack Wells and Harold Burns. Centennial has a building fund which probably will be used for more classrooms when increased attendance justifies them.

The Church contributes to Weekday Religious Education, Ladoga Christian Home for children, Prison Evangelism, Crop, Care, and Gideons among others.

It is impossible to mention every individual who has worked long and hard in the repair, remodeling and maintaining of the Church. Each one who had any part will know what he or she has done - so we will just recognize them as a group and say "we truly appreciate the many and varied things you've done and do thank you sincerely for everything".

The Church operated a lemonade stand at the County Fair for many years. This was a satisfying project, but had to be abandoned because of lack of "manpower" and interest. All the tables, big jars, etc. were later sold to the Green Township Volunteer Fire Department who set up the stand at the Fair every year.

No history of Centennial Church would be complete without telling of its Ladies' Aid and what it has done to repair and improve the building and to add to the convenience and comfort of the congregation.

The Aid was organized in March 1922. Many of the projects were a joint effort by the Church and the Aid - still it is almost certain there'd be no church at Centennial today were it not for the Ladies' Aid.

For a long time the Aid paid the preacher. It is interesting to note the sum: \$5.00 a month at the beginning. The Aid sponsored a Homecoming on the 4th Sunday in May until the event drew so few people it was decided to discontinue it.

Projects undertaken and successfully completed by the Aid include basement and fireplace (Holly Gillespie turned the first spadeful of earth), furnace, venetian blinds, paneling the interior, carpet on aisles and rostrum, lectern, cement walk from the north gate to the steps, kitchen with

refrigerator, sink and stove, electric pump and water heater, restroom, a well, and some landscaping.

When electricity became available, the kerosene lamps were retired. New siding was put on over the clapboards. The old roof was torn down clear to the rafters and new roof laid in 1974. The attic was insulated which helped some to reduce the fuel bills. New pews, communion table and three chairs on the rostrum replaced those that had been there for years.

The Communion table was given in memory of Jesse Day and one of the pews in memory of Dessie and Walter Reynolds. One of the palms on the rostrum was given in memory of Rose Teeters, the other in memory of Henry and Elna Tackett.

The Aid is active today with a membership of 23. Brenda McFarland is President, Nell Miller Secretary/Treasurer. Funds from the bazaar and bake sale held in October of 1975 will be used to replace the carpet in the aisles soon. The Aid bought the paint for the basement which was painted just prior to the Thanksgiving Celebration in 1975.